

*The Grace*  
*and*  
*The Love*

*A Book of Benediction*

By  
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TO  
MY MOTHER  
AND IN MEMORY OF  
MY FATHER  
MY FIRST AND BEST TEACHERS





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## INTRODUCTION

THIS book owes its origin to a conversation and a request. It might be worth while, therefore, at the outset to state how it comes to be written and the kind of folk the writer had in mind during its composition. It is not—let this be said at once—a work that makes the slightest claim to being a contribution to theological thought. If it proves to possess value of any kind, it will be within the realm of practical devotion for men and women who have already made some little progress in their pilgrimage.

It began in this way. An old friend approached me one afternoon at a Methodist gathering in the Midlands and remarked: 'I want you to do something which I think you can do and I certainly can't.' He then told me—and I shall never forget the marks of spiritual joy visible in his face and eyes as he spoke—that for many months he had been discovering ever-increasing riches in the short form of the Benediction which is used at the close of most religious services. He repeated the words, lingering over them with deep feeling and affection:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

During the nights of bombing, when long and varied reading or prayer was an impossibility, he had first begun to tell over these phrases, and now he never fell asleep without letting his mind rest on one or the other of them, and so passed from one day's march to another.

Now, my friend is not a cloistered soul. He is no longer young, but he retains the most active interest in the world of life where he has worked and played. He plays a first-rate game of snooker; he has seen more Test cricket than any other man I know, and what he does not remember about Yorkshire cricket and players would not amount to very much. I mention this because he has stood before the circle

of his acquaintance as a business man, a sportsman, a trustworthy friend. He has taken a regular part in the duties falling to a Methodist layman, and has been, to my personal knowledge, an appreciative and critical hearer of the Word, a devout worshipper, a steward and worker in the Church. But he has never been a preacher, a public talker, or a bookish man; and it is precisely his freedom from that which brought emphasis to his request.

What he wanted me to do was this: He was so aware of the richness and joy which had come into his own life at the hearing of the familiar words at the close of public worship, and especially through his subsequent meditation upon them, that he felt sure others would benefit, as he had done, if only their attention could be drawn to them. That was where he thought I could be useful. If I would write an article for the *Methodist Recorder* on the Benediction, he was convinced many people, in town and country, would be glad of it. I think he was over-estimating my powers, though I do most gladly acknowledge the quite amazing friendships that have come to me as the result of writing for the *Recorder*. But I promised to think about it, made a note or two in my diary of what he had said, and in the train, on the way home next day, began to let my mind play upon the subject with the idea of fulfilling as soon as possible what he had pressed upon me.

Then I began to follow his practice of allowing the mind to dwell upon the separate phrases of this shorter form of the Benediction, more correctly called, as in various rubrics in liturgies, *The Grace*—from the first two words in it. There is nothing very original in that. For many years I had tried to use the last moments of consciousness thus. It began as a habit devised to fight wandering thoughts, and, in particular, what the old anchorites called ‘fleshly temptation’, when a soldier and afterwards during undergraduate days; but I had never hit upon this particular subject. Like many religious men, I had used various sequences of prayer

and themes for meditation both by day and night; but this, a form of words I must have used, in public devotions especially, thousands of times, I had never paused over.

That, very shortly, explains the origin of the book. Now for the people in my friend's mind in making his request, and in mine while writing it. They are most interesting, varied people whom we sometimes call the 'ordinary folk'. They are not professional students, though they read books and are often surprisingly able to express themselves about them because they only read what grips them, and therefore nothing is jaded on their literary palate. They are busy housewives with a child or two at school, feeling their need for a few moments of escape; or they are drapers and grocers, harassed with customers' demands that exceed their stores, with a coupon to account for if they sell a yard of ribbon or a pound of sugar. They are officers and men in the Army or at sea—I have two in mind, especially; and boys who have been growing into manhood, with their work not yet properly started because they have been snatched away to the ordeal of battle before they had got properly started on their life's work. And I am thinking of people who have given the best years of their life in Church work. These will have little use for the terms which are so much part and parcel of a minister's mental habits that he can only with difficulty believe that other people do not understand them. But these are primarily the people who must learn to do God's work in these days; and therefore they should have some touch of joy in it. We are emphatic to-day in stressing what work there is to be done, and we are lamentably out of tune with the spiritual life.

It was something of the inner meaning implied by the threefold prayer that I was asked to unfold. That meant I must think about it myself.

St. Paul accidentally bequeathed this Benediction to the public worship of the Church by using it as the concluding

sentence of his second letter to the Corinthian Church. It is only a sentence; but, like so many of his sentences, it holds immense treasures for those of us who will let the familiar words live in our hearts, disclosing their own meaning among the variety of moods and experiences which come to us in our intercourse with men and God. Like a jewel which has been long possessed, but has recently been cleaned and reset, so that the owner finds new and enriching delight in it, discovering all manner of colours and lights which had not been noticed before, familiar phrases arrest us from time to time, disclosing more of their unending beauty and wealth. This is what my friend had learned. It is what every Christian could share, for it belongs to the immense treasury of what we call our faith.

What follows, therefore, is neither a detailed exposition of the words nor a close-knit argument. It is an attempt to catch some of the meaningful lights and colours in the religious life which depends upon Christ's grace and God's love, experienced in the fellowship of the Church where we are awakened and nurtured by the Holy Spirit.

## CHAPTER I

### THE GRACE OF OUR LORD

COMPLAINT is often made to-day that people have little knowledge of, and less use for, the technical terms of religion. They are frankly impatient of theological language. That is not to be wondered at; for it is unfortunately all too true that, whereas religion came to this earth most perfectly in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, so unaffected and compelling in its attractiveness that children left their games to hear Him, and old men hobbled along from their discussion groups in the sun, now it has little in common with the talk of people who go to football matches or sway precariously on leather straps in crowded tube trains.

'Jesus', I have heard men say a hundred times, 'laid hold of men with arguments, illustrations, words that they could understand. Even if they disagreed with Him as to the possibility of their following Him as disciples, they had, at least, no illusions as to what discipleship involved.'

It is fair shooting. We take up a Gospel and read what Jesus said. Perhaps our eyes alight on the parable of the sower or the story of the men who had different endowments—five talents, or two, or one. Perhaps it is a word of deep and tragic import, as when He warned His followers that they must take full account of what loving God involved; it might mean death upon the hated cross—public execution, a holiday for sightseers, and all the fun of the fair, with their own nakedness and death as the chief attraction. How impossible it is to miss His meaning! Men may complain about the antique language of our English Bible and say that it is too far removed from the medium of their ordinary speech for them to be able to read it with sustained interest. But can they say that about the language

of Jesus, even in the Authorized Version? I very much doubt it. No! If we track it down, we find they make their complaint about the speech used in some of the writings of Christ's Apostles—especially that of His greatest missionary Apostle, Paul. It is a common gibe that what Christ made simple and precious to the multitude, Paul made hard and obscure to a few. •

That is not fair to Paul. The kind of language modern critics select as being typical of his speech probably bears the same sort of relationship to his actual preaching and conversation as the language of John Wesley's published sermons bears to the style of the sermons he preached which held colliers spellbound. When we remember that the eighteenth-century collier was an illiterate man who loved blood sports, pugilism, cock-fighting, bear-baiting, he must have been a very extraordinary fellow indeed if he also loved discourses which are as stark and abstract as a report of a philosophical society's proceedings. The fact is that Wesley published his sermons largely for the guidance of preachers and leaders already initiated into the life of religion and Methodist practice and now needing certain standards of doctrine to which they could refer. It is not true to say that the style of Paul's letters provides an exact parallel to that, but there is a similarity. The parts of his letters which men not trained in theology find so difficult are directed to people who already are initiated into religion and are living as Christians in active membership of the Church. What we call the language of devotion, the language of the Church, even the language of theology, must soon take shape and form wherever religion is practised. It is doing so to-day in China and India, in the virile life of the younger Churches there, as definitely as it did in the first century. Enthusiastic people who are living in the strength of new-found religion are not jaded in appetite and listless in attention. On the contrary, they are eager to get the finest expression they can concerning the meaning of this spiritual experience. The



terms are not obscure, though they may be difficult. They shine with meaning, and they are necessary. It is not the ordinary parish clergyman or circuit minister who can talk of the ways of God to men with fresh and fascinating variety, yet with simple, daily speech. The saint, the poet who is a lover of God may do it, as can the best preacher and most spiritual writer: but theirs is an art which conceals art. They have fought their way through to clarity of speech and vision, so that profound truths of a spiritual kind can be conveyed in words which a peasant can understand. That triumph does not belong to everybody, though every preacher, lecturer, and writer should aim at it. And we see such disparities not only in the field of religion, but in other realms of human attainment. Plato is a supremely great philosopher. Much of his philosophy is stated directly and with the grip of a story so that a schoolgirl can read him. (I am not for a moment supposing she will grasp all his truth.) But many modern philosophical writers, whose names will vanish like bubbles on a stream, give us a headache with half a page.

Now, Paul—let us be fair to him—never called himself a philosopher, a doctor of the Church, a theologian. He did call himself Christ's slave; he did call himself a prisoner, for the sake of his love for Christ, and he did aspire to be Christ's ambassador. He was extravagant enough to speak about 'the foolishness of God', but he hastened to add that it was wiser than the wisdom of men. That kind of language is the language of love, of fidelity, and also of joy. It is the language of a soul openly and gladly acknowledging indebtedness.

All this needs to be remembered because it was he and his contemporaries who gave us the beginnings of our religious terms; and from the earliest days he used this word 'grace' concerning Jesus Christ and what Christ could do for men. It was descriptive of something wonderful which came into life. It was a word which he saw fitted with peculiar rightness the living portrait of his Lord for

whose sake he had, as he put it, 'suffered the loss of all things'.

Christ! I am Christ's; and let the name suffice you,  
 Ay, for me too He greatly hath sufficed;  
 Lo, with no winning words I would entice you,  
 Paul has no honour and no friend but Christ.<sup>1</sup>

If one is going to see anything of the richness that belongs to this phrase, it is worth while to ponder a little the meaning of words. Their various meanings can flash and gleam like the iridescent colours of a peacock's feather or a tropical butterfly's wing. And while it is true that there must be some words which, even in religion, are only for a time, for a generation or two, there are others which belong, not simply to the student, but to the members of worshipping congregations for all time. This word 'grace' is one such when linked with the name of our Saviour. From earliest times, when a man who remembered Him spoke of Him as being 'full of grace and truth', to our own days, the word is essentially Christlike.

How common it is, for instance, in our hymns! I have just picked up a hymn-book and let it fall open. Almost the first words on which my eyes alighted were:

Balm of all my grief and pain,  
 Thy *grace* is always nigh;  
 Now as yesterday, the same  
 Thou art, and wilt for ever be.  
 (M.H.B. 365.)

On the opposite page to that hymn of Wesley's was Julius Hare's 'Day after day I sought the Lord':

He taught my soul a new-made song,  
 A song of holy praise;  
 All they who see these things, with fear  
 Their hopes to God shall raise.

<sup>1</sup> F. W. H. Myers, *St. Paul*.

O Lord, what wonders hast Thou wrought  
All number far above:  
Thy thoughts to us-ward overflow  
With mercy, *grace* and love.

(M.H.B. 367.)

Now, if I were not a Christian at all, but had simply come across those lines in an anthology, I might dismiss them as not being of the highest order of poetry; but I could not deny that they were wrought in complete sincerity and that they rang true to some mighty experiences of life where men were conscious of being in need and knew where to look for help. In their awareness of need, help had come to them from God and gratitude had made them sing. Many of us have known the kind of experience that made us want to sing. It is not only in the hamlets of green England that the 'mute, inglorious Miltons' abide; they can be found in factories, offices, and shops, in the East End and the West. If I had never sung a Wesley hymn in Church or read a book of theology, I should fasten on that word 'grace', for it is equated with 'balm of all my grief and pain'. It speaks of strength given for weakness and light for blindness. It has joy in it. I know what it is to have pain relieved. I know what it is to wait in anguish for a doctor's verdict. I know what it is to hear the high-pitched cry of a new-born infant and the groan of travail which was part of its purchase-price of life. I know that, in spite of all the devices of amusement and entertainment, of friendship and comfort, of books and travel, of medical aid and remunerative employment, life sometimes hangs perilously upon a thread and down below are the abyss and the rocks. A kind of vertigo possesses the soul. So swiftly, so suddenly, may disaster come. The possible tragedies crowd into the mind, the dread of the morrow daunts one's mind amid the tasks of to-day.

It is thus, in life's exchanges of fortune, that a man learns

his deepest, most secret, most persistent need—his need of God. And it is born out of the experience which is sure of God's nearness and help that the thought of grace springs into being.

The Christian, then, associated grace, first of all, with his Lord and Master. It is personal, it is associated with a voice, a pierced hand, a 'dear disfigured face'. That is precisely what Paul does: it is equally what Charles Wesley does, or any other man who has known the same intensity of threat and deliverance, of despair and wonderful hope.

If we are to look for the grace of Christ as objectively as possible, removed from the context of our own moods, we see it revealed most explicitly in the work which is described in the Gospels. There it is at the very fountain-head of our religion. Even a schoolboy knows in these days that the Gospels were not written before Paul's letters—that if we had the books of the New Testament arranged chronologically some very surprising changes would occur, and little-read letters would occupy the pride of place which is now given to St. Matthew's Gospel. We know that even the earliest Gospel—St. Mark's—reveals the influence of Church worship and life, already established.

The scholar can point with a surprising degree of accuracy to thoughts and phrases which can be matched with similar thoughts and phrases in Pauline writing which is obviously of earlier date than the Gospel. But, even so, that fine, clear simplicity and wonder-holding narrative of the Gospel is different, and vastly different, from much of the abstract writing where Paul is giving a loose rein to his native, but trained, intelligence. I have read of a Japanese criminal being converted by reading a Gospel in his own speech, without any instruction whatsoever; and missionaries have told me of such instances. I have known many people, of quiet life and obscure ways—shepherds, ploughmen, artisans—who have told me how intimately they have felt the presence of Jesus when reading His own words. A

professed monk and university lecturer like Luther may turn to the Epistle to the Romans. John Wesley knew his heart strangely warmed while 'one was reading Luther's preface' to it. In our own day I have known men at Oxford and Cambridge who said life began anew for them in reading Professor Dodds's magnificent commentary on Romans. No man who knows the history of religious thought and experience will ever disparage the mighty and perennial fountain of evangelical religion in Romans. But it is still true to say that the wayfaring man (which probably means to-day the kind of commercial traveller I saw last summer reading a pocket copy of St. John's Gospel in the train to Carlisle) will hold in his heart that when he reads the Gospel he is reading the very words of Christ, as, indeed, he is, as much as any man can ever read them. Well, then, before his eyes as he reads, he sees the beginning of the work which belongs to the grace of Jesus Christ. There it is, on every page.

It is most definitely associated with His work; something is done and done uniquely.

The Gospels abound with stories which show precisely the kind of occurrence which requires for its description what we mean by grace. Jesus, in His crowded days and nights, is imparting strength, life, healing, joy, compassion. A man's child is healed, a man in the grip of evil habit is released from it; the poor have good news brought to them. It comes most pointedly to one's notice, for example, in the story of the man born blind whom He healed to the chagrin of the Pharisees and the mystification of his parents (John ix). To read through that chapter thoughtfully is to see grace personified in Jesus, its work in a harsh and mysterious world (for why should men be born blind?), and also the opposition it arouses. It is, in little compass and on small scale, a spiritual history of God's pleadings with the whole race, where sometimes privileged nations and churches reveal the cantankerous spirit and hard arteries of that

moribund priesthood. Fear and love, delight at discovery and dread of consequences, superstition and inquiring faith, all meet there. The word 'grace' does not appear in the chapter, which is so much the better for our purpose. But that phrase, 'One thing I know, that whereas I was blind now I see', rings out across the centuries. It is caught up and echoed from every land where the same work has been done. This is the language of the soul—not merely of 'the soul's invincible surmise', but its majestic certainty. That man would have known what Charles Wesley meant by—

Balm of all my grief and pain,  
Thy grace is always nigh.

In any experience of the coming of Christ's grace into life, there are two features always to be seen. We have already mentioned a preceding condition of the inner life—restlessness, dissatisfaction with oneself, an acute, even if subconscious, sense of need. When this state is changed through close relationship with God, we notice the presence in the soul of spiritual vision and vigorous life. We find a new capacity for seeing and a capacity for doing. The story of effective Christianity, no matter in what branch of His Church, or at what time, shows men and women in various stages of becoming more and more like their Master. The branches that are fruitful bear grapes that attest the living connection with the Vine. This experience lies at the very centre of all we mean by evangelical religion. It has never been put more delightfully than by Bunyan in *Grace Abounding*:

But upon a day, the good providence of God called me to Bedford, to work on my calling, and in one of the streets of that town, I came where there were three or four poor women, sitting at a door, in the sun, talking about the things of God. . . . And methought they spake as if joy did make them speak; they spake such

pleasantness of scripture language and with such appearance of grace in all they said that they were to me as if they had found a new world.

‘As if they had found a new world!’ Precisely. And a really ‘brave new world’ without any of the bitter sarcasm that underlies the phrase in the title of Mr. Aldous Huxley’s book. It is the power to see and to adventure into a new world of being. It happened thus for Mary Magdalene long ago in Palestine, and it was, from day to day, increasingly true for Mary Slessor in Africa, or Mildred Cable in the Gobi Desert. The laughter of Francis of Assisi and the happy friendship given to so many people by C. F. Andrews may both be traced back to the same source.

I have seen it repeatedly with my own eyes, happening in the lives of people of this present age. And all these are unanimous in saying, *singing* rather (for the language of this confident spiritual life needs music as well as speech), that this has happened only through God’s gift to them. Of their need they have been only too well aware and of their readiness to seize whatever help might be offered them; but at last it came to them as a gift. When the Apostle was invoking the grace of Jesus Christ to be with his people, or when a modern minister concludes an act of public worship with the apostolic words of benediction, we are brought again to remember that the most valuable spiritual realities come as God’s gifts to us. As we know and use them with increasing sense of their worth, we thrive in His service.

## CHAPTER II

### GRACE AND BEAUTY

To know the grace of Jesus Christ is also to become aware of beauty, both in the world of Nature and in the lives of men and women. Religion grows the rarest flowers of personality in strange places, where it would seem that the soil and climate of life were hopelessly inadequate. Yet this miracle is surprisingly overlooked by many of the people who dismiss the claims of faith with an epigram. Beauty and religion, far from being associated with each other, are often represented as being mutually exclusive.

Of course, all men of cultivated taste admit the chaste beauty of Lincoln Cathedral and Salisbury's spire; they cherish the stained glass of York or the amazing carvings of Chartres. I will not be second to them in praise of these things. Do I not remember dark, winter afternoons in King's College chapel, when the wind whistled through the elms in the Backs and a sudden flare of red sunlight pierced through the great west window to give point to the prayer, 'Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord'? And carols heard in New College at Christmas-time are for ever mine, with the memory of William of Wykeham's cloisters darkly contrasting with the flood of moonlight on the tower. The man who has worshipped in such places has the inner secret of their charm as the Agnostic can never know them. But this, after all, is not of the essence of religion so much as its happy, external setting, the mere furniture of it. I have heard people casually praising a chapel, set in the quiet fastness of the hills, with sheep grazing on the slopes in full view of the congregation. They would have passed by its counterpart in a back street with a sniff of contempt. But when a handful of people, worshipping in a back street, sing, 'Now let us see Thy beauty, Lord'—a landscape opens before their eyes which is not to be depicted easily by brush or pen. For those who know 'the secret none can utter', it



is undeniably real. I have known that beauty as completely in the back street as in cathedrals, and dare not deny it.

Were it not so, we must admit that Chelsea gains the day and the taunt at our shabby little red-brick conventicles wounds us mortally. And Fleet Street joins with Chelsea to satirize us because of the remoteness of the language of devotion from that of the newspaper. Religion lacks attractive brightness. If you must have a cross, let it be lit up with neon lighting; it will then stand a chance of being noticed among the theatre signs and advertisements for drinks and patent medicines. Religion has not the same attraction, we are told, as the cinema. Thank God, it has not. If you want the churches to be crowded with worshippers, make them more up to date! It sounds curiously like making the place where the Risen Lord is to be sought a little more like the temples of Mammon. It does not seem to make sense, if you look at it from the Christian point of view. Of course, if your standard is box-office receipts . . . !

We do not for one moment feel complacent either about the state of religion or the sanctuaries which bear the name of Christ and are often strangely deficient in the loveliness He praised. Yet religion has much to do with beauty and with life's inmost joy. The servants of God, whatever their particular loyalty in the Church of Christ, are insistent upon this. Von Hugel—whose charity and wisdom have made more claims upon us non-Roman English-speaking Christians than any other great Catholic of modern times—recurred to this point again and again in his writings.<sup>1</sup> One of 'the Facts and Truths concerning the Soul' he says, is that:

The Divinely intended End of our Life is Joy overflowing and infinite, a Joy closely connected with a noble asceticism. There is a wholesome, a strengthening zest attached to all action which is right and appropriate for the agent.

<sup>1</sup> Von Hugel, *Essays and Addresses*, Second Series (Dent), p. 239.

Good John Wesley was subscribing to this principle when he set in the very forefront of his hymn-book a section of hymns entitled 'The Pleasantness of Religion'.

But this zest, this joyousness, goes back a long way for its aptest statement, recognized by all men of religion as coming nearest to saying what is ultimately unsayable.

One thing I have asked of the Lord, that will I seek after; That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. To behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His Temple.

That is not fanciful, but the true aspiration of the soul. Religion breaks out into song, and though popular singing may not always use the tunes cathedral organists approve, it shows appreciation of beauty. It may be a long way from 'Lloyd' to 'Jesu, Joy of man's desiring'—but they both lead in the same direction. Spiritual beauty, which is revealed chiefly in life and judgement and attitude does exist among the most bizarre and conflicting standards of taste, using that word in a secular sense. For that matter, some of the saints of God would have looked strangely out of place at a modern dinner-table. Imagine Francis of Assisi at a Guildhall banquet! But there could be no oversight of his dignity, chastity of speech, forbearance, and kindly tolerance. While his sense of humour might have a literally upsetting effect upon servants waiting at table!

The little things of life, our changing customs and manners, would put us all out of court if we could return to this earth in two hundred years' time. But these go down before the positive attraction of men and women in whom may be seen what we mean by the grace of Jesus.

One rarely hears the word 'grace' in ordinary conversation, but sometimes writers use it when commenting upon actresses or athletes. I was having lunch one day in an Edinburgh club when a Presbyterian minister joined our

party, rubbing his hands and obviously with some good news to tell. It was only that he had been playing golf that morning when suddenly he had been hailed from a high piece of ground by a beautiful lady asking what was the way to her next tee. 'Man, I shall never forget that voice, and the grace of her. And when I got into the club-house, I found out who she was—Fay Compton!'

There was a day, too, when I heard the word murmured repeatedly by people sitting around me. It was a day of blue sky and buttercups, with swallows skimming low over the Christ Church ground, and Bradman was scoring runs with prodigious speed and seemingly effortless strokes, as supple and swift as the birds in their flight. That kind of mastery in art and skill which wins the admiration of the casual onlooker, is not very far away from the breath-taking wonder which breaks into men's hearts when they see Jesus. Translate the mastery into life—'the sheer business of living' and there is an essential shade of meaning in grace which ought never to be lost from the Christian's mind.

In the New Testament, as we have already noticed, the word 'grace' is predominantly expressive of Divine favour, God's help to men through the coming of Jesus into their lives. But where that ever happens there will also come the use of the word with the meaning it bore in earlier Greek literature, 'gracefulness, graciousness, gratitude'. It is in that musing, rapturous sentence: 'We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.'

It is this spiritual quality of beauty that can uniquely commend religion. For the religious life is increasingly a vision of God, with deep contentment pervading it, even though it must endure deserts of aridity and the harsh setback of fortune, with crowding pains and sorrows which are always liable to assail the heart that has much to love. One of the things that no minister of religion can ever deny is that his life is made rich by contact with the world's best

people. They may never, in the social sense, deserve that title. Indeed, they may be very poor, many of them will certainly be sufferers, and some will be put upon by exacting relatives; but they reveal in their outlook and conduct, even, very often, in their facial expression, undeniable beauty. They have prayed, and not in vain, 'Let the beauty of Jesus appear in me'; and surely this was precisely what St. John had in mind when he wrote—as Dr. Moffat translates the verse: 'What we are to be is not apparent yet, but we do know that when He appears, we are to be like Him—for we are to see Him as He is.'

For my own part, I have no difficulty in believing of such a man as Bernard of Clairvaux that, so compelling was this positive quality of attraction in his personality, 'Mothers hid their sons from him, wives their husbands, and companions their friends'. That must have been even more true of the Master than of His disciples, and there could have been no little stir in the houses of Capernaum when He walked its streets, conflicting emotions and desperate longings. It takes a lot of enthusiastic people to attempt to take a man by force and make him their king!

By far the greatest number of Christ's most ardent followers have gone to their graves unchronicled. They have shown the most authentic marks of successful religious life. They have been known only to the narrow circle of their homes and churches, but their faces come to the minds of those who ever met them when the words of the prayer are heard:

We offer Thee most hearty thanks for the grace and virtue made manifest in all Thy Saints, who have been chosen vessels of Thy favour and lights of the world in their several generations.

It is by the growth of such lives in the midst of the hurly-burly of the world's markets and games, wars and crises, that religion is justified.

But such lives are not produced swiftly and easily. The first fruits of revival can be almost instantaneous, as England learned in the eighteenth century; but still the life of spiritual beauty requires time and variety of experience before it reveals its full authentic self. The soul may gain its vision through sight of Christ's grace in another life, or in a moment of unpredictable and inexplicable illumination; the attainment is spread out over succeeding years, and in different circumstances, some favourable, some adverse. Character never thrives on monotonous ease.

The beginning of the quest for goodness comes to some men in a spiritual awakening to the familiar world of natural beauty. This needs to be recognized more freely than it often has been in the past. Religion is not merely utilitarian, and grace a power-current that is strangely switched on to galvanize sluggish natures into work for God. It is not the beauty of goodness which makes the first appeal, but the goodness of beauty. Such is the approach of Christ's grace to the prodigal in John Masefield's 'Everlasting Mercy'. Saul Kane leans out of the window, in revulsion from his companions:

I opened window wide and leaned  
Out of that pigsty of the fiend  
And felt a cool wind go like grace  
About the sleeping market place.<sup>1</sup>

The cool wind was 'like grace'. It is one of the aptest similes in the whole of the poem.

But was it chance alone that made Saul Kane, or any other man, turn with revulsion from the ugliness of life as it was to the prospect of what it ought to be? Mr. Masefield's hero may have been purely imaginary, but instances as dramatic as that abound in the local tradition of churches.

I think of a collier in a northern village who had the

<sup>1</sup> John Masefield, *Collected Poems* (Heinemann), p. 102.

reputation of being the hardest drinker and toughest fighter in the neighbourhood. One night, as he was walking alone from a public-house to his pit, to go down below, he looked up at the sky, and there were the stars. Suddenly he was stung with scorn for himself and all he knew he was. He had seen the stars before, and yet it could truly be said that he had never seen them until that moment. They were 'like grace'. The thought flashed into his mind: 'The One that made those stars made me.' And that marked the end of one phase of life, ugly, blasphemous, lecherous, and the beginning of religion and moral beauty. His mates said that all through that night he worked as if a thousand devils were in him. Perhaps they were! For evil does not lightly evacuate positions where it has been dug in for many years. But the victory was with 'grace'. He became the best-loved man in the village, to whom all children ran. It is beyond the power of the psychologist to explain that deep, mysterious spiritual aptitude in the soul, long buried but still alive, which in a moment put that collier beside Isaiah and Gerard Manley Hopkins, or any other worshippers of God who bowed their heads in awe beneath the stars.

To-day we are continually emphasizing the practical nature of religion. Too often we make her the handmaid to ethics. Indeed, it is not uncharitable to suspect that some members of the community, with great material interests at stake, are revealing in their sudden interest in social morality that most hateful form of patronage which co-opts the Almighty on to committees. Men want His approval for their schemes. Life will become safer, cleaner, wealthier for the body corporate and the individual. That—whatever ethical value it may have—is not very closely related to the grace which the followers of Christ have known.

When Saul Kane, or the Durham miner I mentioned, looked up and away from themselves, their first thought was of God. Swiftly they recoiled upon their own miserable state, confused, broken, wasted. Which comes first, the

vision or the penitence? The question has only to be asked and the answer is known. It was when Simon Peter saw Christ with eyes newly awakened by spiritual understanding that he fell on his knees and said, 'Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man'. It was when Isaiah saw the Lord 'high and lifted up' that he said, 'Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.'

Effective Christian preaching, no matter in what age or among what people, has always brought men thus to know Christ. It is not by the catalogue of their shortcomings, or by the economic security of the righteous life, but by the sight of 'the King in His beauty' that many men have been born into new life.

The great beatitude, 'Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God', acquires ever richer meaning as the years of discipleship increase. One may doubt whether youth normally sees the glory of it. Youth, striving towards single-mindedness, and having to do mortal battle with the powerful instincts of the body, is often engrossed with the task of gaining handhold and foothold for its later conquest on the peaks of life. To resist illicit appetite, to become free from unchaste desires, these are the immediate problems—and to be pure is the reward of resistance and aspiration. But presently there comes the knowledge, 'the reward of it all'—and it is one of the signs of spiritual progress that this knowledge does come to us—the sight of God is life's purpose and meaning.

It is a far cry from a drunken poacher, looking out on the wonder of the night in an English market-place, where Severn and Wye flow among their gentle, wooded hills, to the contemplation of a saint like Teresa in her cell. But what begins at the moment of conversion is often repeated in the life of those who are becoming better members of Christ's Church.

The spiritual climb of the soul is spiral, like the flight of some birds. It returns over the same spot again and again, but each time on a different plane. It sees the same things, but in ever-varying perspective. It can fall—fall like a peregrine that hurls down almost vertically on to its prey—and so, fascinated through temptation, undo in a moment the work of years. But as the horizons widen, the quest becomes more positive. We know that the prayer made for Simon was also made for us, and though evil may have desired us, the prayer of our Saviour gains our ultimate and most lasting allegiance. So regret—which is a different thing from healthful penitence—has little place in the spiritual life, for opportunity is ever more rich and abundant. And not with monotonous consistency and easy beat—for there are periods of stress and buffeting which must be endured—but with vividness, unforgettable vividness, the soul sees God. 'The rapture swells, the wonder grows.'

Many years ago I knew a man of exceptional and vigorous spiritual life—one of the very few people I have ever known with a genuinely mystical nature. He should have been a writer or a preacher, but he was chained to a counter all his days through the selfish eagerness of his father to be rid of his boys when left a widower. If ever the day's work and its detail deserved the name of a cross for any man, they were that to him. But he was faithful to it, realizing that he was in precisely the situation where God had trained many of his best servants, and so he revealed to all who were enriched by his friendship and counsel the authentic marks of spiritual beauty.

He had a most intense dread of sin. He knew that stoop of the soul from its high place to some mean object of prey—a thought, a glance, a swift retort even. The fires burned fiercely for him all his days, for he was extremely virile of body as of mind, with a poet's sensuous equipment which did not easily yield to the curb of the will. He loved com-



pany, especially of men who worshipped with him, and that of his family. Yet what I remember as most characteristic of him—and it is the hallmark of one who has reached the level of spiritual contemplation—was the fact that, if ever he could snatch a day away from his shop, his first choice was to spend it on a beach, a dozen miles away. It was in the days before every little cove was put at the mercy of charabancs and cars. He would lie on that beach of grey limestone pebbles, with the cliffs behind him draped with clematis or bright with foxgloves, and all his time was given up to what he called ‘thinking about God’. That was the answer I got from him when, as an inquisitive boy, I pressed home the question, ‘But what *do* you do with yourself?’ And it was obvious from his sun-tanned joy and mirthful voice that he had gained something which, however perplexing and mysterious it might seem to me, was quite real. To a boy it seemed a waste of opportunity. There were rare butterflies to be found along the base of those cliffs, innumerable flowers, and birds of many kinds; the pools were rich with sea-creatures, and the sea was there for swimming. Later on, when I knew him better, I discovered that his thoughts of God embraced all these colourful creatures. Not much that happened, from the flight of black-and-white oyster-catchers to the passing of a liner homeward bound from the West Indies, missed his vigilant eye. His very stillness gave him insight to what I was always looking for and never saw. No robin ever perched on my boot for ten minutes on end, as it did on his! Out of such rare occasions he was winning an enrichment of a very different kind from that which sunbathers can ever know, who spend their hours in ‘day-long blessed idleness’ with detective stories or portable wireless sets which drown the whisper of the ocean.

I am not saying that all Christians can be what that man was. But I am sure that all Christians should discern, in the way God makes possible for them, the purely spiritual interest which lies at the heart of the religious life and

experience. It is something about which we are apt to be very shy. It is something which, all too often, even preachers and teachers of religion have avoided or disguised, especially in these years in which we pride ourselves so much on schemes and plans. But it is of the nature of our life. This is what profits a man's soul. The way of beholding the beauty of God must vary from life to life and nation to nation, perhaps from age to age; but the essential value of it is obvious when we pause to think and pray about it. And in this, as in so much, we discover that our apparently free initiative is being gently but firmly directed by the activity of God Himself. He intends our vision of Himself to reveal the meaning of our own lives which will else be hidden from us in the confusion and jumble of their moods and vicissitudes.

### CHAPTER III

## AN ANCIENT QUESTION—IS GRACE FOR ALL?

WE have seen a little of what we mean by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ at work in men's lives. Admittedly, the instances we used in the last chapter have shown some extremes of spiritual experience, its beginning in circumstances very different from those known to most people, and an advanced stage of religious meditation and joy which may appear to us, at our present stage of development, neither desirable nor attainable.

We shall be wise, however, at this and every point, to remind ourselves that what is not at present known to us concerning our future growth is already known to God. Only within very limited ranges can we assess the limits of our own possible experience. Yet we should have learned enough by the stages through which we have already passed to conceive the possibility of other changes ahead of us. A man who has lived only half the normal time of human life has already passed through some very remarkable changes, not only physically, but in taste and desire. When I was a small boy a man lived near us who had something of a reputation locally as a cricketer. Occasionally he would bowl a few balls to me, and I marvelled at the pitch and break which could take my wicket any time he chose. Then he gave up cricket and took to bowls. My hero was there, among the greybeards every Saturday afternoon. What is more, he became an international bowler. It seemed incredible, even wicked to me, that he could leave the domain of King Willow for the slow ritual of a bowling-green. So it does seem absurd, even repugnant to us, when we are twenty and have our greatest physical joy in threading through opposing backs or planting a tennis-ball as near as possible to the chalk, to think that a bowling-green or a

garden, even, on occasions, an armchair and a sleep, can be as truly joyous to us at a later stage of life. But what is thus true of personal pleasure is equally true of spiritual experience. The facts of life should warn us against too great dogmatism regarding the unknown future. The way to life may be along a narrow, pilgrim track; but it is not the same track for everybody. Its end, however, is what the saints have always called 'The Vision of God'.

To admit that much is necessary and right. But there is a question which arises inevitably. It may come soon. It may come late. It was put to me once by a group of sixth-form boys in a public school. They asked, 'Does our being religious depend upon our temperament?' They had hit upon one of the great dividing questions of life. I have heard a man excusing his bondage to a vice which involved, not only his own downfall, but other people's, and he was answering that question without ever having put it clearly to himself in youth. He said: 'I am not really to blame; after all, it is my nature.' That was a very feeble excuse, not a reason, not even an explanation. The hole in the dike of that man's will had once been small enough for him to stop it up with a little finger of effort: the subsequent breach that let in the flood could only be repaired by miraculous help from God. And even such restorative grace, given us by Christ, cannot completely efface some of the grievous effects of vicious habit on the lives of innocent victims. We see that very clearly in the transmission of the effects of terrible diseases which sprang from drink and lust. The parents may long since have repented and done all they could to mend for the future what was the legacy of a terrible past; and there can be no more awful pain than the sight of suffering caused by one's own wilfulness in sin: but some penalties are unremovable.

Among practising Christians, one meets this question repeatedly as to the possibility of any man, any woman, receiving the grace of Christ. It is oftener implied by action,

or by refusal to act, than by speech. Excuse is offered for non-attainment of a virtue, or for polite but stubborn refusal to undertake some small piece of service. The bald excuses of the men in the parable who said they had bought fields and oxen, or had just got married, are substantial reasons in comparison with some that a minister encounters in his pastoral rounds. Here is a little bunch of sentences spoken by regular churchgoing people. 'I feel there is nothing so helpful as visiting the sick—but I am so sensitive: it would make me ill.' There would be little point in sending unsensitive people to help the sick! 'Have you given a blood transfusion? Oh! it's marvellous what they can do with it. I wish I could do it—but I dread anything that has to do with hospitals.' As though anyone liked being pricked with a needle, or giving up half an hour of his time—though no service is simpler and less costly, in comparison with its benefits to sufferers, than modern blood-giving. 'I love animals, but I shall never shelter a stray dog again. It hurt me so much when one I took into my house for a few days was claimed by its owners.'

Now all this may appear to be fanciful or neurotic, when read in cold print; but it is the kind of thing I have heard from the lips of men who on Change are very formidable folk and from ladies most competent in their houses and gardens. Deep down in themselves they are saying that there is in them some one impenetrable barrier to the grace of Jesus Christ. It may be of desire, that they do not want to do what they know they ought to do. It may be a fault of temperament. Some things Christ can do for them, and some they can do for Him; but they feel they cannot have what the old evangelicals used to call 'full salvation'. They are answering with a definite 'Not for me!' the question which Dr. W. E. Sangster has put so well in one of the chapters in his latest book, 'A perfect life in an imperfect world?'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. E. Sangster, *The Path to Perfection* (Hodder & Stoughton), p. 168.

Whenever we come to such a state of mind, and retreat from a plain challenge to our duty, we are very near, though we probably do not recognize it, the source of a deep-seated theological trouble. I use the word 'trouble' rather than 'problem' because theological problems suggest the atmosphere of the class-room. They are redolent of old leather folios and ancient desks, with the names of dead divines carved on them, all set in a pleasing context, with the mowing machine whirring outside and rooks calling in the elms; and that suggests afternoon tennis, tea, and cigarettes. But what is thus debated with a light bandying of the names of Augustine and Pelagius, Bernard and Abelard, Luther and Calvin, Wesley and Whitefield, Kingsley and Newman, was born in the combat of life, its battlefields and shipwrecks, its high delights and treacherous despairs. 'Lord, are there few that be saved?' Am I among the few? And if I am not, is the fault in me or—daring, assaulting thought!—is the fault with God? *Can* I be what I have seen I ought to be and what, in my best moments, I want to be?

Such questions underlie real and painful states of life. Can 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us *all*'? If not, what a mockery it is to say the words! Indeed, it is blasphemous. St. Paul wrote them first of all as a prayer of benediction for people whom he knew in churches at Corinth and Thessaly. As the words were spoken and written, he visualized the folk whom he had seen brought into the new life which Christ's grace had enabled them to live. But already there would be other Christians in those churches, converts whom he had never seen. And he was very anxious to bring inside the Church all who would accept the invitation and condition of discipleship to the Saviour. Certainly he used the word 'elect' of those who thus actively responded to the call of the Gospel and the members of the churches; but he never said that he or any other man had the power or right to exclude genuine seekers. What he wrote to his beloved follower, Timothy,

he could, with varying degrees of meaning, have said to any young man: 'My child, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.' The Benediction could become everybody's.

The grace of Jesus Christ is intended for *all*. With what eagerness Paul would have seized upon Charles Wesley's lines:

For all my Lord was crucified,  
For all, for all my Saviour died.

It would help us very greatly in all our religious thinking if we would remember that what seem to us the shibboleths and party cries of vain men wrangling in the past over hair-splitting and abstruse arguments were originally expressions of intense and genuine religious experience. When a young man of the nineteen-forties says lightly, 'I've no use for the Nicene Creed. Why can't we have our belief stated simply, but, of course, adequately, in our own mode of speech?' he will probably be applauded by many of his friends. It is quite legitimate that what the Nicene Creed says should be expanded and expounded in our current speech. We ought to attempt that task. But I remember an afternoon when a whole roomful of men and women students said: 'Let's draw up a modern statement of belief which will avoid the pitfalls and difficult abstractions of the Nicene Creed.' A week later we listened to the various versions. There was only one point of unanimous assent—and that was that the creed drawn up by everyone else was wrong; it did not satisfy one's own demands. So after deleting and altering clauses and pitching paper after paper into the fire they ended up by saying: 'Well, it looks as though we shall have to keep the Nicene Creed after all.'

That had been a very useful, if humbling lesson. It was worth while that they should have made their own efforts at stating what they did deeply believe about God—but now they realized how difficult it is to make religious expression

crystal clear, accurate, and comprehensive. Moreover, it helped them to set about their proper job, which was to understand better the spirit and the meaning of their living faith, which has never been better expressed than in that noble Creed. As I heard Studdert Kennedy say once with inimitable joy and sincerity: 'The Creed is the rolling of the drums of the Church Militant.' We have too often thought of it as the muttering of old men whose days among the dead were passed instead of the inspiration for our present tasks and future purposes.

It is not necessary that we should all have studied the history of doctrine in order to possess and recognize the grace of Christ. It is most necessary that we should appreciate the sincerity of religious experience which men were seeking to express in their various views. Only the clever bystander can scoff:

Go it, Justice! Go it, Mercy!  
Go it, Hotspur! Go it, Percy!

The tracts, personal animosities, scurrilous party politics associated with doctrine are often, admittedly, the worst of their kind; but behind all is the quest from day to day and year to year of men sincerely seeking the light. It is in Luther—but it is also in Newman. It is in Wesley—but because he interpreted some things differently, we must not say: 'It was not in Whitefield.'

At the risk of labouring this point, let us see how two very popular hymns are expressions of true religion and of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, though their authors would have put widely differing constructions upon some of the words and ideas expressed in them.

One of the fiercest and most fanatical opponents of John Wesley's views of grace was the curate of Blagdon in North Somersetshire, who had originally been converted by one of Wesley's preachers. On sunny afternoons in modern times, charabancs take crowds of visitors from Weston-super-



Mare to Cheddar and Wells. They stop at a cleft rock by the side of the road, and their drivers point out that it was while sheltering here from a heavy storm the minister of Blagdon—Augustus Montague Toplady—composed his famous hymn, 'Rock of Ages, cleft for me'. The excursionists know nothing about Toplady; but they do know the hymn, which is quite the best thing he ever wrote. They probably imagine him as a venerable, devout parson of the parish. He was, as a matter of fact, a young man (he was only thirty-seven when he died in 1778), an extreme partisan, though generally charitable in conduct, apart from doctrinal issues. He was typical of his notorious century when he wrote pamphlets, one of which was called, *The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination Stated and Asserted*. In his hymn, Toplady wrote:

Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to Thy Cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress;  
Helpless, look to Thee for grace.

In theology, as we have mentioned, he could be a dogmatic upholder of predestination. Some men were saved, and some were damned; and no man could change the category in which he was, though, equally certainly, no man could be absolutely sure (until he died) into which category God had put him. That is always the catch with extreme Calvinism. So far as daily living is concerned it must resort to the assumption that God loves the individual and he should make glad response to Him; but whether he will be among the saved or the lost is an inscrutable mystery.

When people sing Toplady's hymn, they associate the help of Christ with their needy souls. See a long procession of black-clothed Welsh miners following some dead comrades to a bleak cemetery on the hillside, and hear their wonderful hymn-singing as they walk. I do not envy the man who can watch such a procession without being deeply

moved; and when they sing 'Rock of Ages' it is impossible to doubt that every man there is not only awake to the aching sorrow of his community, its new-made widows and orphans; he sings as one convinced of the efficacy of the Rock to shelter them all. Miners—like sailors—are religious men. Toplady was writing much 'larger than he knew' when he was inspired to give us that hymn. God used him far beyond the narrowing limits of his parish and his century and his intellectual comprehension of God's ways with men.

But when those Welsh miners change their hymn, and sing, as only they can, 'Jesu, Lover of my soul' to 'Aberystwith', who notices now that they have changed theological camps? This was written by an Arminian, a 'grace-for-all' man, as contrasted with Toplady, a 'grace-for-some' man. Great hymns, in their marriage of phrase and melody, are the language of the soul. In that way we become most articulate and know ourselves to be in active quest of help from the only Saviour of 'all sorts and conditions of men'. The black-clothed little men lift up their eyes, above the gaunt pithead with its idle wheels and plume of steam, above the mean rows of cottages on the lower slopes, past 'Carmel' and 'Mount Moriah' and 'Salem' chapels or the little Episcopal church, up, up to the bracken and gorse to the crest of the mountain and discern against its skyline a Cross that tells of Love which will not let them go.

Plenteous grace with Thee is found,  
 Grace to cover all my sin,  
 Let the healing streams abound;  
 Make and keep me pure within.

If Toplady and Charles Wesley could stand on the hillside and look down on such a spectacle, would they not join hands and hearts in thanks to God, who would not let their best work perish because it was circumscribed by bickerings in the eighteenth century?

It is undeniable that the experience of Christ's grace—His help, comfort, and strength—comes to some men with what can only be described by them as irresistible power. But yet it is the power of love in action, not an electric current. And love, though it presses its claim insistently and passionately, always admits of free choice and acceptance. We shall be foolish if, in modern religion, we overlook that element of action on God's part. The Shepherd looks for the sheep, *until it is found*; Christ stands at the door *and knocks*. The Biblical phrases, picturesque and emphatic, all maintain this sense of the Saviour really saving. This pressure of love, amounting at last to an irresistible plea, is traceable at least as far back as the days of Hosea. It is most apparent in Augustine, among the great ones of our faith. Many streams of opinion, fashion, sentiment, take their rise in him. At first the head-streams lie close together; it is only a stride from one to the other and their similarity is obvious; but the flow of their consequences in later men's lives and opinions sets them far apart. The life and religious experience of Augustine became a great watershed. He, therefore, has had hard things and good said about him by Christians of very diverse views. Like Paul, he is too big to be claimed by one party in entirety; but all parties would hate to feel he was outside their ranks. Evangelical Protestants and ritualistic Anglo-Catholics, dyed-in-the-wool Calvinists and Methodists acclaim him as their father as insistently as Augustinian Friars—and he is so much greater than his supporters and claimants that in their heady contests and championships one is reminded of the famous judgement that 'all have won and so all shall have prizes'. For if we have those simple inward faculties of vision and discernment which are uniquely praised by our Saviour, we cannot fail to see the mighty fruitfulness of Augustine's spiritual experience as it has transmitted its genuine power to others.

Outside the life and times of the New Testament, is there

another man his equal? The hot sun of Africa is in his heart, and its swift, passionate vitality never flags. This vitality is most characteristic of him whether one follows him to the abyss of despair or to the peak of vision. Consider this prayer:

O Holy Spirit, Love of God, infuse Thy grace, and descend plentifully into my heart; enlighten the dark corners of this neglected dwelling, and scatter there Thy cheerful beam: dwell in that soul that longs to be Thy temple; water that barren soil, overrun with weeds and briars, and lost for want of cultivating, and make it fruitful with Thy dew from heaven. Oh come, Thou refreshment of them that languish and faint. Come, Thou Star and Guide of them that sail in the tempestuous sea of the world; Thou only haven of the tossed and shipwrecked. Come, Thou Glory and Crown of the living, and only Safeguard of the dying. Come, Holy Spirit, in much mercy and make me fit to receive Thee.

Every phrase in that prayer is stamped with unmistakable sincerity, and the whole is typical of the man. Some words of Alice Meynell's in a short Introduction to the *Confessions* express what many of us feel about Augustine:

The great men of the race are they who are chiefly capable of a great sincerity. Other men may be entirely sincere, but the entire sincerity of great natures is of larger importance; of them it may be said that they are not relatively but absolutely and positively more sincere than the rest. And in nothing else, obviously, is a great sincerity so momentous as in religion.<sup>1</sup>

Augustine was in his thirty-third year before the great day came when he heard the voice in the garden 'as of a boy or girl' singing repeatedly: 'Take up and read, take up and

<sup>1</sup> Alice Meynell, *Confessions of St. Augustine* (Grant Richards), p. v.

read.' That was in A.D. 386—and a man of thirty-two in those days was in full maturity. The *Confessions* did not appear until round about the year 400, when Augustine had been Bishop of Hippo for four years—and he wrote and did so much else between the time of his baptism as a convert and the year 400 that it leaves one sure that the *Confessions* is a book of memories written in the light of rich, subsequent experience. It has maintained its position as one of the very few source-books of private devotion. The Church historian must study his administrative work, the systematic theologian give heed to his doctrinal contributions, the modern Christian sociologist will read again *The City of God*; but for all these and for thousands of other men Augustine lives pre-eminently in the *Confessions*; and the most casual reader, quite untrained in ways of dogmatic theology, cannot miss the element of urgency, of Divine compulsion in the book. Once—in comparatively recent times—such intense experience of the soul as the object of God's untiring pursuit was given passionate utterance in verse, which Augustine would surely have understood and approved; and that was when Francis Thompson wrote *The Hound of Heaven*. Augustine could have said: 'That, in different form, is my own story.'

We cannot overlook, we cannot fail to be arrested by this human experience of the intrusion of God. It is the element we cannot get rid of in religion, nor should we want to, for it points to the truth that we are not in a universe which is impassive and cold, but one in which we are meant to grow up under the tuition of our Creator and Redeemer.

It was also somewhere round about A.D. 400 that a British monk, Pelagius, came to Rome. He was quite possibly a remote relation of those same Welsh miners who sing the songs of Zion and pilgrimage at funerals in the Rhondda Valley—though Pelagius would have something pretty caustic to say if he could see it now. How green was the valley 1,600 years ago! Pelagius had all the buoyancy,

quickness of mind and independence which we associate with the men of that country. He came up against some thoughts and sentences in the *Confessions*, which had just been published, and was being talked about by many people who had read it in Rome.

Then, a few years later, Pelagius was a refugee. Rome was sacked, and he had got out. He crossed over to North Africa to Carthage, to gain freedom and respite from war. How strangely modern all that sounds! And there, of course, he was right in the middle of the mighty Augustine's sphere of influence. Pelagius, nothing daunted, was not going to accept everything that was said even by Augustine in his own diocese. In particular, with that British characteristic of giving people the benefit of the doubt, he denied that man was such a complete mass of corruption as Augustine implied and said. To Augustine things were black or white. Not so Pelagius. Certainly men needed the grace of God, but they were not all bad fellows and much of God's help they received in the ordinary way of human endowment and attainment. Unfortunately, Pelagius got mixed up with an Irishman, who already seemed to display the national love of a scrap and of being 'agin the government'. The result of this was, as it is usually in argument, political or theological, that each side got more and more intransigent, unwilling, and, at last, unable to see the element of real religious experience which the other originally possessed. Pelagius became what we would to-day call a 'humanist'—a man with considerable faith in his native ability to rise in the spiritual scale—and Augustine became more and more dogmatic that salvation was 'all of God and none of me'.

He was harking back, as he had a right to do, to that un-availing struggle which he had made to become free from shackles of habit and life. He was hearing again the unforgettable voice: "Take up and read." But he was no longer pliable and sympathetic with all sorts of fellow sinners; he

was the ruler of a large diocese, the leader of people likely very soon to be faced with battle, fire, and rapine from barbarian invaders. The poet and dramatist in him were too deeply overlaid now by the ecclesiastic, the administrator, the defender, not simply of 'faith', but 'The Faith' as he conceived it. Dr. Wand has summarized Augustine's views at this time in eight lines:

He relied upon his own experience of special grace without which he was sure that he could never have recovered from his evil ways. He felt that grace was necessary to make the fallen will free, and that without this preliminary exercise of God's goodness man would never be able to take even the first step towards reformation. In addition to this, there must be repeated gifts of grace to assist the struggler on his way.<sup>1</sup>

We need not go on to the insistence which was imposed, especially in the West, on the connection between spiritual grace and material means in the sacraments. We have seen how real and unforgettable was Augustine's experience of the same kind of help as that which the man born blind had known when Jesus healed him in Jerusalem. It is exactly the same kind of spiritual awakening and renewal as Charles Wesley exulted in:

I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,  
My chains fell off! My heart was free!  
I rose! went forth and followed Thee!

Ought we still to expect such arresting, invading experiences of Christ's Presence among us? Has the Divine way of approach changed completely?

It is true that one does not nowadays hear religious experience of a most private kind tossed glibly from lip to lip. But it is not all gain that, with greater literary and physical comforts, we have become so reticent that we do

<sup>1</sup> J. W. C. Wand, *A History of the Early Church* (Methuen), p. 231.

not speak to friends and neighbours of God's approaches to our own souls. The men of my generation have never known the Methodist class-meeting as the place it was for our fathers, though we may have known it as a place of spiritual power. But for them open confessions resulted in absolution, and defeat was turned into victory. The man who had been on the peak of vision drew others up to see what he had seen. It was recent, it was authentic, it made them missionary in spirit and expectant in devotion. They came out with joy on their faces because they knew that they had received grace from Christ as they had met, a band of brothers in fellowship human and Divine. There, in the intimate and often lifelong fellowship, was realized an element of common life which far outshone in its richness and variety the more sheltered community of many a monastery. Perhaps some of the men were a little glib, in tongue and heart. There were curious 'characters' in those classes whose weekly 'experience' could have been put on a gramophone record and played over; not a word, not an inflection, was ever changed; but all those people accepted as the foundation of the religious life the belief that Christ had come to their own souls. In their own humble way, they had known the meaning of the experience which was Paul's on the Damascus Road, and Augustine's in the garden, and Wesley's in Aldersgate Street. Do we expect that initial visitation of Christ now?

I have only to pause for a moment to know the answer. The finest people I know of my own generation and of younger people, too, all know the inner meaning of this grace. There is nothing—allowing for changes in dress and custom—which Augustine chronicled that has not been told me over and over again in my own study and on country walks. It is, if I am to be plain, the secret history of God's dealing with my own self from my cradle.

Is such grace irresistible and only for a few of us? Is it not that, in spite of our yielding to it—should I not say to



Him?—we could have resisted if we had wished? Do we not know men who were once genuinely 'in grace', but 'just for a handful of silver' they left us, or for a ribbon to stick in their coat?

In all this we have been trying to relate what are real and urgent spiritual experiences and problems for men and women of our own time, with the history of religion as we can see it in the lives of our forebears. We will conclude with an instance of the way in which the writer has seen one life develop under the insistent pressure of what was unmistakably the grace of Christ.

The man I am thinking of is doing great work for Christian education in Africa. He is not an ordained minister. We were boys at school together; we also were near neighbours and members of the same church. He was a couple of years older than I—a good athlete, an excellent scholar with a quite astonishing flair for mathematics.

One evening, before the war of 1914, we heard an address by C. T. Studd of the 'Heart of Africa' mission. Studd captured the imagination of every boy because we all knew of his cricketing prowess, his Cambridge 'blue', and the subsequent sacrifice of cricket and life in England for China and missionary work. Most of us had no idea at the time that Studd had been the means of capturing for God's work in Africa someone whose lifelong loyalty would make him a worthy successor. I say 'Studd' because he was the preacher; but it was the entrance of God into a boy's life of which I am thinking, compelling and sure, as long-lasting in its effect as it was once for Augustine. My friend got his open scholarship at Cambridge, as we all knew he would; and then came war—as it has come again for the second time in our lives. Immediately he enlisted. Thereafter, as private and as officer, there came all the sordid, necessary routine and adventure—wounds, trench feet, France, the Balkans, and decoration for bravery on the field. No one, I think, of all his comrades, ever guessed how firmly his faith

and love were holding him still to that vision of Africa's need. His character told its own glorious tale, and no hut, dug-out, or mess was anything but proud of him. Then—since even wars end at last—he was demobilized and went up to Cambridge. Maths. he had to study, by the terms of his scholarship, and he could probably have been teaching and studying there still; but the call was now even clearer, and answer to it more possible.

Life has demanded of him close acquaintance with many of the griefs in St. Paul's famous catalogue—separation from family and friends, ill-health, sorrow, labour—and long after (by the standards of physicians in Harley Street) he should have left Africa, he is still there. This Christian missionary owes his success in a great cause to the initiating and sustaining grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Whatever he could contribute of natural will-power and choice has been necessary, but subsidiary, to what I can only describe as supernatural. I am sure that at every step his choice could have been made in a different way from that in which it was made. I am sure that, in fact, it was the immense pressure and influence of God, who wanted him for Africa, that was both the initiating and determining factor in all this long and finally fruitful loyalty. It was not all God's own doing, for there were others who had heard Studd's call, and their emotion and imagination were touched as genuinely as my friend's. Yet it was not a matter determined irresistibly by God. To say that would be to fly in the face of all the problems and decisions that had to be weighed and made. There had to be debate, consideration, resolution, and, above all, much worship and prayer.

In non-technical language, it comes to this. The experience of Christ's grace is not intended for a few, but for all. Despite temperament and environment, despite sin or disposition, the benefits of Christ, both for our world's sake and for our own, are meant to be everybody's. But we are free, as every person loved by another is still free in his own

personality to resist and finally even to refuse to respond actively to that love which is offered him. If our experience of the grace of Christ, then, is not strong, continuous and rich, the fault is not in Him, but in us. The way in which our choice and habit of life can most fully become sensitive to His approach is what we should next consider.

## MEANS OF GRACE

A PHRASE in the *General Thanksgiving* links together in the mind of the worshipper 'the means of grace and the hope of glory'. It is not a merely fortuitous combination. It carries in it the vista of eternal, sunlit realities seen through the narrow window of present circumstances where we are in the crowded and dusty room of life with its threadbare furnishings and very ordinary experiences. So sometimes in a northern manufacturing town a worshipper can look through a high window in a church that is set among mean streets, railway lines, and factories, and see nothing of these, but only the majesty of clouds in procession and the peak of a noble hill. Without the practice of devotion, continuous, steady, deliberate, there can be no successful, even triumphant conclusion to our toil and trouble.

A sentence in Newman's sermon for Trinity Sunday, 'Peace in Believing', speaks implicitly of this link:

After the fever of life; after wearinesses and sicknesses, fightings and despondings; languor and fretfulness, struggling and failing, struggling and succeeding; after all the changes and chances of this troubled unhealthy state, at length comes death, at length the White Throne of God, at length the Beatific Vision.

That is not a dignified disguise for a coward's soul, a shining cope beneath which lurks that mean but quite imaginary spirit which Communists have taunted as Christian, afraid to reach out for itself and take whatever substantial prizes life may offer, preferring to wait for 'pie in the sky when we die'.

It happens that these words are being revised just after

the sight of a stern and terrible contest with 'the last enemy'. No one who has watched and tended a friend through the successive phases of which Newman speaks, until 'at length comes death, at length the White Throne of God', can doubt that triumph comes only to those who have used 'the means of grace' faithfully through their mortal days and so acquired 'the hope of glory'. After my friend had passed into quietness through long and cruel ordeals of unrelievable pain and discomfort, an exercise book was found, neatly written, with full instructions, not only concerning his estate, but the way his family should think of him without mourning and with cheerful anticipation of reunion. If he had been anything other than the faithful, practising Christian that we knew him to be, he could never have left such radiant words, concluding: 'All is well.' More often than the world guesses, it is the privilege of a minister of religion to witness such crowning triumph to a good life. It silences all doubt; it sweetens all ensuing loneliness; it inspires all subsequent endeavour.

What, then, are the ways which we must follow if we would know increasingly the grace of our Lord? Are they laid down infallibly and unchangeably? If so, where are they to be found?

The answer is that they are to be discovered in the most constant practices of the best Christians of all ages and climes and temperaments. They are written in the Book which is the Book of the spiritual life. Much is prescribed in the Bible—but never in a mere catalogue of duties, and much is prescribed by the common practice of religion in the various branches of Christ's Church. If an apple tree can be recognized even by townsmen out for a cycle-ride on a Saturday afternoon in September because red apples load its boughs, how strange it is that so many critics miss the fruit of the tree of faith! They fasten upon the obvious differences and disagreements of denominations, and yet overlook their immense common treasure and agreement

which goes so far as to produce the fruit of character which is discernibly the same, though the life may be that of an Italian Catholic or an American Quaker, a Scottish Presbyterian or a Chinese Methodist.

There are certain practices which should not be minimized or avoided if we would seek worthily to belong to the company of the Christians. It would be absurd if it were otherwise. In religion, as in every other art and function, no man can strike out completely on his own, without any sort of obligation to the experience of those who have gone before him, as well as to his contemporaries. Means of grace are ways which spiritual men and women have discovered, leading to better life and more certain vision. Means of grace are ways which God permits, encourages—even ordains. Let us not be afraid of a little healthy dogmatism on that point. If we are to live as human beings, we recognize that there are certain practices 'which are requisite as well for the body as for the soul'. We must eat and drink; we must sleep. We may be as severe in our asceticism as a Carthusian monk, but even so we must eat a little food, however plain and monotonous, and we must drink, though we may choose to endure much thirst; and we must not rob ourselves entirely of sleep or we shall rob ourselves also of reason and life. Suicide has no place within the Christian scheme, and the most severe asceticism has always stopped well short of it. We recognize that so long as God wills us to be human in body as well as in soul, bodily existence compels us to meet its needs.

All this is very obvious. But the strange and illogical behaviour of human beings is in nothing more absurd than in its facile expectation that success in Christian discipleship should be possible without recognition of the few indispensable practices of religion. We do not expect that even a great genius, a Beethoven or a Keats, should succeed in his art without considerable effort and study; but we overlook the fact that even for geniuses in religion (there are such

people—Wesley was one and Kagawa is another) the same kind of laws must apply. There is a cultivation of the spiritual life without which we cannot be disciples. Quite apart from people of mystical temperament and disposition this is to be seen in the lives of men as practical in their goodness as Shaftesbury reforming factories or Chiang Kai-Shek saving China. Certainly, a man whose eye is always on his spiritual temperature will become as selfish, morbid and introspective, as hesitant and fearful, as one who always carries a thermometer in his waistcoat pocket. But the larger fact is not altered, that without specific, spiritual activity, religion becomes mere ineffective profession.

What are the few practices indispensable to the soul for its growth and duty towards God and in expectation of renewing grace?

They are, briefly, participation in the public worship of the Church of Christ, and the practice of constant, private devotion. Without both these conditions as the climate of our spiritual life, we may be people of quite sincere profession, we may call ourselves Christians; but the plain truth will be that we have taken it upon ourselves to differ from all the great masters, including our Lord Himself.

Before we claim exemption from any of the privileges and duties of discipleship, we should, at the very least, make certain that we are not trying to improve upon perfection. And when we consult the Gospels, nothing is clearer than that Jesus shared to the full the public means of grace in the synagogue and the Temple as long as men permitted Him to do so. The little phrase used by St. Luke is of very great significance; that when He came to His home town of Nazareth 'He entered, *as His custom was*, into the synagogue on the sabbath day' (Luke iv. 16). Equally important are those clauses that touch upon His private devotions: 'He withdrew Himself in the deserts and prayed' (Luke v. 16) and 'He was praying alone' (Luke ix. 18). They illustrate His well-known precept to the disciples: 'When thou

prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall recompense thee' (Matthew vi. 6).

Such little descriptions as these are not important simply because they refer to the days of His active ministry. Of course, they are of unique value in that connection because they show what He would never neglect, no matter how busy or pressed He was; and they are a standing rebuke to us when we say we could not go to church because someone came to tea or we missed our night prayers because we had been to the cinema, got home late and had to be at the office early next morning. There is something else. These little phrases—and there are many others like them, scattered up and down the Gospels—give us insight into the time we call 'the hidden years', the long stretch from the day when He was twelve years old and His Mother found Him in the Temple precincts in the company of teachers and hearers, to the day when John the Baptist's trumpet-call was answered by His own entry upon the public scene.

We can therefore be confident as to this twin necessity of public worship and private meditation. If it were not written plainly in the lives of His followers, it would be sufficient that this is our Master's example. Later in this book we may pay greater attention to what should happen in our private devotional life, as well as to our own share in the worshipping activity of the Church. At present we want to make it indisputably clear to our minds and hearts that, if we would really possess increasingly the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ for all the manifold duties of our own day, there are some things we must do and for which we must make time and place.

Suspicion often lurks in men's minds that insistence upon churchgoing is simply a minister's fad. He is justified in pressing it upon people, of course, just as an agent for vacuum-cleaners is justified in persisting, to the point of



becoming a positive nuisance, that this article he sells, and no other, is exactly what the housewife needs and must have. But that is not a right analogy. The point is that, from New Testament times until now, this 'assembling of ourselves together' is of the nature of an indispensable and God-given commandment and condition.

Whatever we think of modern Churches, we shall, at least, refrain from accusing the members of the first Christian Churches, in Jerusalem and elsewhere, of being interested in religion for the sake of stipends, prestige, and careers. They had no church premises worth naming, no organs and choirs, no institutes and billiard tables, above all, no salaried ministers. For them, as I heard an outspoken woman say once, 'It was all "Givel" and no "Get!"' But they were resolute upon meeting together in worship as their means of certain grace. Why? Because it was a continuation of the habit of their lives when Jesus had been with them in those crowded years before the Crucifixion. It was a continuation and a development of that fellowship, for from the first Easter Day their Risen Lord had never failed to keep His promise. He appeared—not always visibly, but always certainly—to meet them as they worshipped God. The description of that first company of believers in their practice of worship is a reminder to us whenever we are tempted to disown what has been the established and fruitful habit of the centuries. 'And day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread at home, they did take their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people' (Acts ii. 46-7). John Wesley's insistence upon the fact that the Bible knows nothing of a solitary religion applies to every kind of Christian truly deserving the name. It seems to be one of the laws without exception.

We are not forgetting that among the saints of God have been many famous hermits and recluses. Their withdrawal

from the haunts of men was not a withdrawal from the Church. As a matter of fact, they acknowledged obligations laid upon them by the needs of their fellows. They worshipped with those who sought them out for counsel as well as with wayfarers who chanced upon their dwellings. Even in the Egyptian desert, where asceticism was carried to its most rigorous stage, the habit of common worship prevailed. Later, the great Benedict, the founder of monasticism in its most virile and useful form, insisted upon frequent communal worship. The choir office—the Praise of God—was to be sung by all the brethren by day and night. Such early or medieval practices, which may seem to the modern mind abnormal, have a very different aim from that which is in the mind of the man who wants religion cut to his own individual pattern of likes and dislikes. These men and women sought an intensification of the life of prayer, not a denial of the need for worship. The modern disparagement arises from no such definite spiritual discipline and devotional motive. On the contrary, the claims of religion upon our time and minds are considered to be exacting, monotonous, and unprofitable. The medieval hermit withdrew from the village to give all his time to worship; the modern suburbanite misses church to give all his Sunday to himself.

We may willingly admit that there is reason for describing much of the formal worship of the Church as dull. Really sincere Christians will be among the first to admit the justice of the charge and show their zeal for the improvement of public worship. It does not necessarily mean that they will applaud every attempt to 'brighten' Sunday services. The aim of worship is to do fittingly and sincerely that which pleases God. Anything that is vulgar—in music, speech, or action—has no place within the true worship of the Church. If the theatre or the cinema provides us with our only standard of what is interesting, we may as well admit, first as last, that the Church neither wishes to compete

with them nor ought to. We do long for the day when worshippers will be more numerous than they are at present; but both now and when men crowd to the sanctuary, the tone has been set for us. 'God is a Spirit, and they that worship must worship Him in spirit and in truth.' To fascinate people is not the same thing as to have their spiritual co-operation in the service of God by which men's lives are brought into ever greater perfection for the tasks He assigns to their hands and spirits. Box-office mentality is too often responsible for what one sees of schemes for interior decoration and entertainment of people on church premises.

But, as a matter of fact, there have been wonderful changes in the better ordering of church services, and these have sprung from the highest motives. Even if one admits that a higher aestheticism has had its part to play (and that in itself is a gift from God), there has also been a finer degree of spiritual perception of what is right. When we look for the love of God's house among men, we shall find some strangely plain buildings with the light of His Presence always in them, and some very plain people have radiant joy which finds its expression in the Psalmist's cry, 'Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house!'

I recall a tiny red-brick chapel in Shropshire, miles off the main roads, where only a handful of folk could meet together at the best of times, coming from scattered farms in that green countryside. I preached there frequently to less than a dozen people, but never without a sense of reality—what we so often call 'a good spiritual atmosphere'. The caretaker was an old woman. When she was a young girl, the little place was almost derelict and there was talk of its being closed. One Saturday afternoon she had an irresistible impulse; instead of going out with her friends, she took a pail, scrubbing brush and soap, carried them down the muddy lane to the neglected chapel, and cleaned it from front to back. It takes a lot of grace to do that kind of work for nothing in your only free time, especially when most of

your life, as a maidservant, is spent in scrubbing dairies and milk-churns! But what began then went on for over fifty years, week by week, except for a little time before and after each of her babies was born. She reared a large family on the wages of a farm-labourer. Most of her chapel-cleaning had been quite voluntary, and none of it received more than token payment. But the little building glowed with something that was not due merely to a well-stoked fire and paraffin lamps with brasswork that gleamed. There was an air in that little place similar to the sense of holy association one feels in an ancient and beautiful shrine, linked to the history of a famous saint.

One day she told me of her hopes and fears as she came, Saturday after Saturday, to prepare the little sanctuary for the next day's services. 'I've done a lot of praying while I've been scrubbing the floor. Sometimes my heart has been very heavy, for I have had a lot of sorrow and hardship. But I never came here without realizing it was God's house. I've known it full of His Presence though nobody else was here with me.'

Geographically, it is a long way from Jerusalem to Shropshire. Aesthetically, it is worlds apart to compare the Temple with a red-brick Methodist chapel; but Isaiah, who saw 'The Lord, high and lifted up, and his train filled the Temple', would have understood what that little old woman with the lined face and the sunny smile was talking about. It cannot be assessed by physical science, but it is as though there were an interpenetration of the very bricks and mortar by a spiritual essence when people have been faithful to the means of grace represented by a church, where only two or three may gather, but Christ stands in their midst.

The modern dissatisfaction with this ancient prescription for the wellbeing of men and women is not confined to a few highbrows. It is widespread in all ranks of society. That there is legitimate cause for dissatisfaction with the

slovenly appearance of the premises, the indifference or snobbery of some worshippers, and the casual conduct of the services in some churches does not alter the fact that there is unique benefit which comes to Christian men and women as they take their part as members of congregations. It is indispensable for all able-bodied folk who are free to go to church. By this means they will chiefly grow; without it, they will decline. The fact that invalids and men isolated by duty, like lighthouse-keepers on rocky islands, are enabled to grow in their discipleship without sharing in worship with their fellows simply emphasizes the point. These who are denied it have the most intense longing to possess the privilege which is despised by so many; and it would seem as though God provides such sincere souls with special grace that compensates them for what they miss.

A war correspondent who was with the Eighth Army in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy gave his views on the men's religion. There was no doubt that they respected religion. They had, almost all of them, certain quite definite convictions, though they were shy of talking about them. They were sincere in their admiration of brave Christians, especially of some padres. But—and here what the men of the Eighth Army believe shows itself as a reflex of what most people believe—they had little use for the organized religion of the Church.

That seems to be the modern temper. Religion, if you like; but not the Church. We people who are most anxious for the spread of Christianity should be ready to listen to all complaints and to make all necessary adjustments. Yet, with all its human faults, we are face to face with this feature—that the Bible knows nothing of a solitary, unorganized religion, and through nearly two thousand years Christian experience knows nothing of effective discipleship outside the worshipping community. 'I believe in the Holy Catholic Church' implies the efficacy of its means of grace, by which the soul comes to God, and God draws near to His children.

We turn, then, to consider spiritual need in the light of three great essential practices—two belonging to public worship and the other to our private life. We need the Sacrament of Holy Communion—and we need another help which many of us never hesitate to call a sacrament, the Word of God. These require the presence both of God and of people other than ourselves. Private prayer, meditation, and reading are equally necessary means of grace. There are dozens of others, both public and private. They may range, as we have seen already, from finding God in Nature, in a star or a wild flower, to finding Him through a good film or play. I remember a girl at the University saying: 'I seem to find God most often at the bottom of a test-tube.' But in these well-established ways we shall look at what I would hold to be the bare, irreducible means by which ordinary men and women should expect increasing certainty and joy as they possess the grace of Jesus Christ and the love of God.

## CHAPTER V

### OUR NEED OF THE SACRAMENT

THE emphasis laid upon the value of the Sacrament of Holy Communion, the simple rite instituted by Christ with broken bread and poured wine, varies from Church to Church and almost from age to age. But when we study the lives of Christ's truest followers there is no avoiding its tremendous importance to them. Of course, one immediately recognizes that so great a body of practising Christians as the Quakers, and also the Salvation Army, do not hold to the custom. If it were not beside the immediate point, it could fairly easily be demonstrated that much of the content of sacramental worship exists for them in other ways—in the ritual of silence or in attachment to a flag which is itself symbolic of Christ's blood. For the overwhelming majority of Christians, however, the Sacrament is synonymous with a way of spiritual life of unique significance and privilege. This hidden treasure is contained in very diverse vessels; but it is the same authentic treasure of love from God to man and man to God.

The little conventicle round the corner, where some very 'peculiar' people meet, proclaims from its notice-board that every Sabbath true believers will meet there for 'the breaking of bread'. Thus they proclaim a loyalty to the earliest Christian custom of worship. Elsewhere a vested priest approaches the high altar wearing his green chasuble in the seasons of growth, symbolizing life and hope, white at Christmas, black on Good Friday, or red on Whit-Sunday. Amid the dignity and quiet, the low music and the yellow candle light in an ancient cathedral, he is no more convinced of the absolute necessity of sacramental worship than those others of his brethren who would disdain such ritual as Popish nonsense, but wear the black gown of Geneva and

call their fine Presbyterian folk to solemn Communion four times a year in remote Highland glens.

Long ago at the time of Protestant reform—and there was dire need of such reform—Luther and Zwingli and John Calvin all differed from the medieval Church and from one another on points of sacramental doctrine. But they were firm and insistent regarding the necessity of the Sacrament in the worship of the Church.

The medieval Church had divided the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper into two distinct parts—the Mass and the Eucharist. The Mass was inseparably connected with the thought of the great Sacrifice upon the Cross, and the Eucharist with the thought of the believer's communion with the Risen, Living Christ.<sup>1</sup>

It is noticeable that whenever there has been a revival of religion in this country there has been a marked observance of, and veneration for, the Holy Communion. This is as true of the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century as of the Oxford Movement of the nineteenth, so obviously connected with sacramental observance. It would be a wholesome correction of ignorance if more of Pusey's descendants would read John Wesley's *Journal* and study the devotional practices of his people. They were in nothing more methodical than in this; and the spirit survives among their children of to-day.

The disputes of theologians continue, changing slightly in terminology, and, one dares to believe, with considerably less bitterness of temper. Perhaps, if looks could kill, we might still observe swift assassinations at doctrinal committees, like the deplorable happenings associated with ecclesiastical gatherings of earlier times; but the abiding beauty, solace, and inspiration of the Communion is something living and present to our eyes which quite puts out

<sup>1</sup> T. M. Lindsay, *History of the Reformation* (T. & T. Clark), vol. I, p. 354.



of mind the foibles of foolish men. Still the essentials are that when we come we should approach as hungry men to life's greatest feast, as sinful men swift to say with the centurion, 'Lord I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come beneath my roof', yet equally swift to seize this supreme opportunity of being strengthened through forgiveness and Divine company.

On this point, the hymns of Protestants and Catholics are at one. In the hymn-book I know best, we sing at the Lord's Supper words written by people as different as the greatest theologian of the Middle Ages, the Italian Aquinas, and George Rawson, a Leeds solicitor, whose hymns first appeared in Congregational and Baptist books. A Scottish Presbyterian minister's words are near William Bright's 'And now, O Father, mindful of the love', a hymn of High Anglican origin. Among these Charles Wesley moves, superbly at ease in a truly catholic company. What would Aquinas think, I sometimes wonder, if he could see a dying Methodist holding up her cupped hands to receive the bread in a little room under a thatched roof, yellow celandines outside shining in thousands, and thrushes singing in the budding elms?

Jesus, this feast receiving,  
We Thee unseen adore:  
Thy faithful word believing,  
We take, and doubt no more.

This love of the Sacrament is everywhere, a mark of true discipleship. It is pressed upon the members of some Churches as their duty, the condition of their nominal membership. They must not neglect this means of grace, whatever else they miss. This much is obvious in England on Easter Day when thousands of people flock through the streets to early Communion. Many of them are folk who were confirmed as a matter of course when they reached a certain form at school: it was one of the occasions of

their development, not on a very different level, in their minds and their parents', from a kind of vaccination. Easter reminds them of it—and it is almost their only outward sign of attachment to Christian observance. But it comes as something of a shock to an Englishman who is given the privilege of living for some years in Scotland to see the same phenomenon there, of folk crowding to Presbyterian churches for the quarterly Communion, though with a difference. Who that has ever seen Princes Street on a fine Sunday morning, cold and sunny, can forget the quiet fervour of the top-hatted and white-tied elders and the douce citizens going to their kirk? I willingly admit the merely conventional Scotsman has usually much more understanding and appreciation of the occasion than his Sassenach counterpart.

But such general advocacy by the usage of churches—whatever the label on their notice-boards—is only a pointer to its value. Personal experience of the unique meaning of this service to the soul puts it in quite a different category from that of bare custom and conformity. This is not the oldest and most general of all Christian rites (equal with baptism in that respect) simply by chance. If reason, rather than love, be needed to urge its importance, there can be no greater than that which is incorporated in the service itself in the memory of its institution. The earliest account—St. Paul's description in 1 Corinthians xi. 23–5—of what happened in Jerusalem before the ordeal of the Garden and the Cross is brought always before the worshipper's mind. Whenever we come to Communion, we recall the actual institution of the rite as we pray:

Hear us, O merciful Father, we most humbly beseech Thee; and grant that we, receiving these Thy creatures of bread and wine, according to Thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of His death and passion, may be partakers of His most blessed Body

and Blood: who, in the same night that He was betrayed, took bread; and, when He had given thanks, He brake it, and gave it to His disciples, saying, Take, eat; this is My Body which is given for you: Do this in remembrance of Me. Likewise after supper He took the Cup: and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of this; for this is my Blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins: Do this, as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of Me. Amen.

It may be true that many worshippers begin the habit of receiving the Holy Communion as something they are advised, even commanded to do, in order to take their place as members of the Church of Christ. In the very earliest times, when candidature for full membership of the Church was strictly supervised, as it is still on the mission field, reception of the Sacrament for the first time was an occasion of the very greatest importance. So it ought to be always. It is a sign of health that to-day so much attention is being given to the instruction of young people in the beliefs and customs of discipleship, so that they do come with enlightened minds to their first act of Holy Communion.

At that first reception of the elements, the soul stirs with fresh realization of its already growing love for the Saviour. It may not fully understand the meaning of each phrase and movement of the worship; but this, at least, it knows—here is an act of obedience to One who is worthy of all we can offer to Him. If a man should be challenged by a sceptic as to why he should occupy himself with this particularly simple rite, eating a morsel of bread and drinking a little wine, he may very well answer: 'I do it because my Saviour has commanded me to remember Him in this way.' If he only begins thus, he will very soon find a richness of reality here quite beyond his first apprehension. For obedience of this kind is not comparable to that which a soldier might

show to a military superior or an employee observe towards her employer. The phrase, 'My Saviour', has a depth of meaning in it which implies the existence of fruitful seeds of love; and it is not therefore surprising that one's esteem of the Sacrament becomes greater as the years pass. Youth may find it dear, but conceive it to be not absolutely necessary; later in life we are convinced of its indispensable nature and of our continual need of it.

One's experience as a minister in pastoral practice underlines this conviction. Again and again I have been asked to administer the Sacrament to men and women who were ill, in great pain, and feared they might not recover. The people called Methodists have never advocated a sacramental practice or doctrine which is at all comparable to that of the Catholics. There is nothing similar to belief in transubstantiation, and therefore no question of special efficacy in the elements themselves, no need or occasion for the reservation of the Sacrament. It is almost unnecessary to write the words that superstitious veneration of the rite is impossible among us, for the people who communicate are always the most spiritually virile and sensitive. But very real love, with passionate attachment and desire, does exist.

If there is no belief in what Catholics call 'The Real Presence' inherent in the consecrated bread and wine, there is very definite belief in the real Presence of the Risen Christ with us at the Table. The supreme value lies in our communion with Him, not in the changed nature of the consecrated elements. This is not a doctrine, but an experience. It is an expression, not of what must infallibly occur, but a testimony of what does and ought to occur.

One bracing morning seventeen or eighteen years ago, I was playing golf with my Superintendent and friend, A. E. Whitham, on the Craigmillar Park Course, Edinburgh. Whitham was greatly perturbed because he had been in friendly controversy with a man he highly respected, a wise preacher of the Gospel. Whitham had opened his heart to

him on the wonderful and increasing meaning that the Sacrament had for him, and the other man had seemed to brush it aside with a touch of contempt. I remember Whitham suddenly standing still on the fairway. He had just hit a brassie shot of, for him, quite phenomenal length and accuracy, but he had forgotten such triumph. He looked up to the Braid Hills, where the whins were all gold, and it seemed as though something of their pure flame had got into his eyes. 'You know, Darby, what stabbed me was his remark that it was only an act of memory—all on our side and nothing on His. And for a man to have gone through thirty years of ministry, administering and receiving for so long without finding Christ present in a very special way saddens me unspeakably. What a lot the poor beggar has missed! If the Sacrament doesn't mean that Christ is there, it's something worse than a child playing with her dolls, because we haven't the imagination by which make-believe becomes real for the child.'

What Whitham meant is not definable, but it is easily intelligible. Love and poetry cannot be achieved by definition: they have to be experienced; and so it is with this spiritual observance. But I cannot conceive of any medieval contemplative revealing greater certainty of enriched experience obtained in and through this observance than I have seen with my own eyes.

Most people in young and middle life, people possessed of full health, are not willingly articulate about it. It is otherwise with the sick, the aged, and the dying. These are facing the few precious realities which will persist for them when the occupations and pleasures of the busy years are no more than a memory. It is among these that I find a longing for the Sacrament to be most pronounced. They are people well advanced in spiritual life, with a rich treasury of devotion and a calm, unflinching faith. Apart from them, the only folk who ask for the Sacrament privately, when they are troubled, are those who in earlier years had been

Anglicans or Roman Catholics (it is often forgotten that the flow of converts is by no means in one direction), and a few young people of marked religious attachment who ask for celebration in connection with their engagement or marriage.

Month after month, in all the varying moods of life, such folk as those of whom I think have sung:

Here, O my Lord, I see Thee face to face,  
Here would I touch and handle things unseen,  
Here grasp with firmer hand the eternal grace,  
And all my weariness upon Thee lean.

When they come to solitariness, to the long thoughts and pensive memories of age, with daily enfeeblement of body, they know that the excitement and schemes given to them formerly in the visible activities of the Church are now ended. But this remains. They could not define with theological exactness the various shades of meaning attached to the words of consecration. They would vehemently deny that the bread and wine were anything other than bread and wine. If what remained of the bread went, after the Communion, to feed the birds, they would in no sense be shocked, but rather feel that there was a Franciscan rightness in such a happening. After all, do not the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the children's table? Then why not the sparrows?

The unique value of Holy Communion is that by this means of grace they meet their Lord as a living and very present Saviour. It is not simply an act of memory, as when we visit the grave of a dear friend on his birthday, or as a man goes back to his school or college occasionally and feels the stir of days departed about him once more for a few minutes snatched out of life's hubbub. This is as truly a meeting with Christ as when the two men invited the Stranger to sup with them at Emmaus, and knew Him in the breaking of the bread. Faith is reassured by this ever-new, mysterious certainty communicated by Divine love.

Mysterious it is, and will remain. It is instinct with all the mysteries of rich, personal intimacy. Here all is known, all is confessed, the good we attempted and failed to do, the evil that lured us into momentary treachery or the even more frequent oversights and omissions which sap away the resources of our deepest fidelities. Here all is absorbed into the complete understanding of our Saviour—and Jesus, looking on us, loves us. We want nothing better on earth—and prolongation of this state would surely be heaven.

I gather together the memories of ministry, and am sure of the grace of Christ as it came thus into human lives in many different places. A room where a woman, for years an invalid, could hear—but not see—the joy of young men on the river. A bleak street in a northern industrial town, and the bright glory on the face of an old blind lady, murmuring the Name that is above every name. Candles shining on a dressing-table with a cross upon it, some violets, the bread, the wine, a nurse and her patient making their Christmas Communion together, and the bright star of hope shining in at the window. A night of storm and a man racked with pain, setting out on his last voyage and repeating the sacramental phrase ‘and am thankful, and am thankful’. These, and dozens of similar pictures flash into the mind as memory releases its film of religious experience. I take them as evidence of the value of the Sacrament to people I have known.

There will be no discussion here of that belief, tenaciously held by so many that *everything* depends upon the nature of the elements, duly transformed because of certain manual and spiritual acts performed by a priest whose faculty descends to him along a strange pipe-line from St. Peter. Grace is not a pseudo-mechanical force, and not a magic. It seems little short of blasphemous that men should admit the complete validity and worth of elements consecrated by some medieval priest who was living for years in deliberate and flagrant sin while the Sacrament administered—shall we

say?—after a great act of public worship in the City Temple, St. George's, Edinburgh, or the Central Hall, Manchester, is no sacrament. This precious gift is not a patent medicine for the soul only procurable from a few agents. It is for all God's children.

What a shame it is that we do not appear to see the point of all this more clearly! Would it not be wise to explain the parts of the service, so that communicants may see its sweep and purpose? As a youth, I cannot recall ever hearing a sermon or address on the service of the Holy Communion, nor a detailed exposition of it during preparation for membership of the Church. As a good Methodist, I learned all about Class money ('A penny a week, and a shilling a quarter') and John Wesley's magnificent rules. The importance of attending the Communion Service was stressed, both by lay leaders and ministers; but it would have helped enormously if the liturgy—the noblest in the world—had been described. Fortunately, continual practice does reveal its exquisite proportion and movement, its aptness for all the varied spiritual states and conditions of the human soul in its approach to God. But it is well sometimes—even for folk long used to the service—to recapitulate its main features and its links with the worship of other Christians, past and present. In a paragraph or two, we can recount some of these meaningful phases for the soul in its approach to Communion.

All too often the full Service is not used—though there are still many churches in Methodism where the excellent custom is followed of reading the 'Pre-Communion Service' at morning worship when Holy Communion is to be celebrated; and occasionally the whole Communion Service is used as the order for morning worship, with hymns and sermon, as suggested in the rubric. The whole congregation—and not simply those intending to remain for the Communion—benefits from these first acts of worship. We are bidden to remember our spiritual state by joining in the one



great family prayer of Christendom, and then proceed to pray for open hearts and cleansed intentions. The commandments of God, unchanging through the centuries, are ranged before us, or those few commandments Christ gave, which embody in themselves the full morality of the older ten. These are the rules of life for us. Then we become one with Christians all over the world, in many diverse houses of the faith, as we heed the Epistle and Gospel, and stand to say the Nicene Creed. It is unguessed, I suppose, by nine out of ten worshippers—so tempted are we to think only of our own church and neighbourhood—that these acts of worship are so general. It comes as a surprise even to lifelong Methodists to learn that the same Epistle and Gospel prescribed in their own *Book of Offices* (based, as it is, largely upon the *Book of Common Prayer*) are also prescribed for the same days in the Roman Catholic *Missal*. The words of the Gospel and the Creed thus girdle the whole earth, spoken in many tongues, on a single Sunday.

Later we join in intercession, using that noble, completely comprehensive prayer 'for the whole estate of Christ's Church militant here on earth'. And then we begin to draw away from the general claims of the Church upon ourselves as servants of men, praying for them as we are bidden to do. Fortified and braced by this athleticism of the spirit, as a man needs to be before he can endure the sight of his own failings and shortcomings, we listen to the Address, where we are reminded of our continual spiritual needs and our Master's undying love for us. We 'draw near with faith' and make a spoken confession, each person reading into the general terms of the confession those lights and shades of recent experience which are his own records of life, laying them bare to God before invoking and receiving His Absolution.

When one is sensitive with the ardour of spiritual youth, this stripping away of everything that has to do with convention, and its insistence upon disclosing the nastiness of

our living, seems unnecessarily rigorous. We find it too searching, too penetrative, too exacting. The hot flush of passion, the swift stir of physical vitality, the angry prejudice—all the accumulations of memory and habit rise up vividly and seem to make an impenetrable barrier, forbidding one access to this holy act. Someone's face at a dance, anger roused in a game, jealousy over another man's appointment to a post we wanted, a quarrel in an office, the smart of unmerited disgrace brought upon us by a colleague's dishonesty or lying—these crowding, detailed scenes of our recent life, brought up by memory, so vivid and swift in their movement, accuse and forbid. The words 'We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness' awaken the trumpets of conscience until it seems as though the loud confusion within us must surely proclaim itself to others.

Just as I am, without one plea  
But that Thy Blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, and waiting not  
To rid my soul of one dark blot,  
To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,  
O Lamb of God, I come!

If we would know the grace of Christ we must allow Him thus—He, the Great Physician—to probe our sorest wounds and confront us with our true plight. This was the bitter way by which Mary Magdalene came from the outer courts of this world's feverish and cloying pursuits until, at length, she was fit to stand where dew was on the lilies and about the hem of her dress, the first person in all the world to see the wonder of the Resurrection.

It sometimes happens that a physical malady can be driven

inwards and become intensified because of one's hurry to obtain apparent outward healing—the wound is closed, but the poison flows within, and presently there is terrible, inevitable eruption. It happens much more often that people miss the deep wholesomeness of spiritual health, the cleansing of Christ's grace, because they will not face necessary acts of confession.

In our approach to the Communion, we know that we are all engaged, in God's sight, upon this searching scrutiny. It is not so much we who are active as Christ Himself—revealing to us what it is necessary for us to know before He speaks the word of release. The sense of being joined with our fellows is enheartening and encouraging. But each soul in God's Presence is made to feel and recognize its individuality as well as its membership of a corporate body. There is a double sense—of company and of solitariness.

We are not concerned to debate the point that there may be other occasions when such examination occurs, quite apart from the sacramental service. There are many such moments in our lives, in church and out of church. But here the seeker after life comes deliberately offering his whole life to God, regularly and sincerely coming where the heroes of his faith came before him.

It is with new understanding that we hear thereafter the strong words of comfort and bow our souls, chastened by memory and trepidant with new hope, to praise in the Sanctus 'with all the company of heaven' the holy God whose glory fills earth and sky—and is revealed to our own selves. Of what use that He should inflame the heavens with light or put the primrose near our feet, if our eyes are shut to them? So now our eyes are open toward the dawn of hope, certainty, glad adoration. Like Peter by the lake-side, we have been confused, abashed, but honest in our confession—and we can say to Christ: 'Thou knowest that I love Thee.'

And so we come: O draw us to Thy feet,  
Most patient Saviour, who canst love us still;  
And by this food, so awful and so sweet,  
Deliver us from every touch of ill:  
In Thine own service make us glad and free,  
And grant us never more to part with Thee.

'We do not presume'—but we do approach, humbled, gladdened, to meet our Lord.

I remember an early Communion Service with some young men and women who were preparing themselves for an evangelistic campaign which would test them to the uttermost. It was towards the end of winter and our worship began in the darkened chapel. I could only descry the towering pillars running up like the boles of forest trees into the shapelessness of night: my friends' faces were without detail, like flowers seen at dusk. But as we moved on through the service a swift and colourful dawn came. The shafts of the windows stood out against the crimson, green, and yellow of an amazing sky, like one of Peter Scott's paintings. Stained glass proclaimed its pattern, and faces showed sensitive to the moods of life, while outside the birds burst into song.

That is the kind of 'pilgrim's progress' one finds in this act—a growth of light, meaning, detail. It is the day—the full, God-given daylight of our religion, promised to us over and over again by our Lord, and never denied to us. With quiet confidence, we draw near—not in presumption, but hushed and sure that He is nigh. If I were an artist I should want to paint the faces of people as they thus receive the grace of Christ anew into their lives. 'Lord', they seem to say, 'with Thee I am ready to go both to prison and to death.' The beauty of it is that so many of them do. Like Peter, who used those words first of all, they may deny Him too often, and all too fiercely. But they return; for His Love never lets them go. Some of those faces I recall from that early morning Communion in an Oxford chapel have taken

the smile of Christ into hospitals in the Midlands and where men suffered in the Far East, into ships and aeroplanes and camps, into pulpits and public schools, into the service of the State and into home life, where their children have happily inherited life endowed with true religion.

This is a means of grace—it is necessary; indispensable.

## CHAPTER VI

### OUR NEED OF THE WORD

THE place given to preaching in Protestant Churches and the esteem in which it is held seem, in the eyes of many Catholics, to be not merely disproportionate, but ridiculous. 'You fellows are for ever preaching—you are preaching mad. I don't know what on earth you find to say', a friend in another communion said to me one day, with that affectionate banter which is only possible between men who have genuine liking and respect for each other. He was putting playfully what other men have said bitterly. For it is becoming fashionable, even among some Free Churchmen, to cast doubt upon the spiritual value of frequent preaching.

It is true that in the non-episcopal Churches we have very few meetings of people for worship on Sundays or weekdays at which speaking is not considered, at least by the majority of those present, to be the focal point. Even the celebration of Holy Communion is usually preceded by a sermon. I can only speak intimately of that branch of the Church in which it has pleased God to give me birth and service. Certainly a Methodist is proud of the heritage which began in preaching and hymn-singing and continues its chief contribution to religion in those ways. 'A Methodist preacher' is the title which, above all others, describes the function of a minister who 'travels' under the direction of the Conference which originated under John Wesley. Even the test of a candidate's sincerity and capability for a lifelong ministry which will be many-sided is, among us, chiefly that of his potentiality in preaching. Scholarship and business acumen are alike subordinated to this. If a man fails in preaching, he is very unlikely to be admitted to the ranks of the ministry. That there are other functions in the ministry is readily admitted, and increasingly we recognize

that God does not call all ministers, not even all Methodist ministers, to their best and most lasting work for Him in the pulpit. Yet there are very few ministers—even among those who spend the whole week wrestling with Church finance and administration, cooped up in offices in Westminster or Manchester—who do not preach at least twice every Sunday. They would feel their life's work was incomplete were this not so. And it is a truism to state that the general estimate of a minister made by our people is first and foremost determined by what kind of work he does in the pulpit.

This—which is certainly true of my own Church—is almost as certainly true of the members of other Protestant communities. We were raised up first of all by preaching; we have been sustained and used by God through preaching; and if we depart from that tradition our special functions in the Church Universal will have ceased. Our last chapter took notice of our need of the great Sacrament of the bread and wine and its helpfulness to the human soul; but our spiritual life will fall short of its true range unless we also recognize and meet our need of the Word. Indeed, we do not hesitate to use the phrase 'The Sacrament of the Word' as describing what happens when God communicates His love and grace to the hearts and minds of His children through the spoken word of a preacher. And it is one of the surprising and continual joys of a pastor to learn how mightily God uses men whose preaching may never have brought them wide popularity. The one-talent man is as successful, in proportion to his gifts, as his more highly endowed brother.

The fact is that, whenever religion becomes virile, it has been awakened or sustained in this exercise of the faith. So far as the history of this country is concerned, the testimony to the value of preaching God's Word to men is enormous. But our claim is no less than that the Gospel itself began in this way. Before a word was written down, before a sacrament was instituted, 'Jesus came into Galilee, preaching

the Gospel of God and saying, The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the Gospel' (Mark i. 14-15). With those words the first of our four Gospel-writers, St. Mark, sets out upon his task, probably following very closely what St. Peter had told him. The people had to be gathered together, recruited by preaching before they could know the further practices of religion.

We need to get rid of the 'either-or' mentality in religion. 'Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' So Jesus refuted the Tempter; and so, in other days, strong Protestants sought to refute superstitious sacramentalists. True catholicity of spirit and of life will recognize, however, that neither Sacrament nor Word should be expected to stand alone. The one is complementary to the other. The one function is aided by the other. And, as a matter of fact, the thorough-going Protestant is a sacramentalist, if of slightly different emphasis. For if an 'outward and visible sign' can convey to the soul an 'inward and spiritual grace', surely an 'outward and *audible* sign' can perform the same high spiritual function. This conception of the greatness of the function of preaching received its formal statement during its revival in the rise of the Protestant Churches. Thus, in the *Scotts Confession* of 1560 in which the voice of John Knox is dominant, we find:

The notes of the true Kirk of God, we believe, confess and avow to be—First, the true preaching of the Word of God, in the which God has revealed Himself to us. Secondly, the right administration of the Sacraments, which must be annexed to the word and promise of God, to seal and confirm the same in our hearts. Lastly, ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered as God's Word prescribed, whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished.



The same order of arrangement, it is significant to notice, is followed in the *Thirty-nine Articles* published by Queen Elizabeth in 1571.

*Article XIX.* The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached and the sacraments be duly administered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.

But the great necessity of hearing the Word is declared to us by every faithful generation of Christians. In times when religion loses its hold upon people nominally of the faith, it will, invariably, be found that attendance at the ministry of preaching has declined; and, similarly, when revival has occurred and men have been brought back to the ways of active discipleship, not a little of their newly-won loyalty is due to preaching. It is obvious in the beginnings of the Church. The great commission of our Lord before the Ascension was that His disciples should go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole of mankind. So also Paul gave thanks for 'the foolishness of preaching'.

It would be interesting to trace this close connection between preaching and religion through the centuries. We should see its influence coming into the lives of people in small medieval towns through the work of the friars or again through Wyclif. Professor G. M. Trevelyan summed up that phase of revivalism in two sentences:

It was because it was at once the freest, and, with the possible exception of the confessional, the most potent religious influence, that Wyclif chose the pulpit as the natural weapon of reformation, and laid such great stress on the necessity for more preaching, and again more preaching. It was his avowed object to make people

attach more importance to the pulpit than to the Sacraments.<sup>1</sup>

With slightly varying emphasis, that verdict could stand as a statement of the attacking and offensive power of religion against entrenched evil in every age. Without preaching there could not have been the mighty awakening in the Age of the Reformation. The people needed bread, as Latimer once remarked, not strawberries that come but once a year—the daily bread of the Word of God. Later when formalism was at its dullest and coldest the tremendous, world-altering revival of religion, beginning among the people of Great Britain in the eighteenth century, was entirely due to this means of grace. In what other way could Wesley and Whitefield have touched the colliers of Kingswood and Newcastle, the people of the new cities and the countryside alike?

All this is of the most obvious truth. What is not always so quickly recognized is that even the subsequent and very different revival of the nineteenth century, which we call the Oxford Movement, associated almost exclusively in our minds with reversion to Catholic forms and practices, owed much to preaching. What would it have been without Newman in the pulpit of St. Mary's? It is a sign of the vagaries which can possess otherwise clear-sighted people that many of the spiritual descendants of that liturgical and pro-Catholic movement disparage preaching as a means of grace, in oblivious disregard of the tremendous spiritual awakening which it brought to Newman's hearers. Froude, the historian, was no supporter of Catholicism, but he recalled the shudder of awe which ran through the congregation when Newman reminded them that He to whom crucifixion and torments were done was none other than God Himself.

<sup>1</sup> G. M. Trevelyan, *England in the Age of Wycliffe* (Longmans Green & Co.), p. 127.

It was the same compelling power of the Word of God ringing out once more under the roof of St. Mary's as men had earlier recognized in Wesley or Wyclif.

The preacher, whether in ancient or modern times, is God's ambassador and pleads in God's Name for spiritual conviction in his hearers.

If we were considering this subject from the preacher's point of view, our approach would necessarily be different from that which we must follow. We are thinking now, not so much of the message to be given—which is the preacher's concern and responsibility—as of man's need for attention to the Word when worship takes the form of preaching.

We will waste no time over lamenting that in all churches some preaching is to be found that is not living, persuasive, and nourishing. The preacher, like the poet, as Tennyson remarked, is 'born *and* made'—and some are, no doubt, appointed to the work without the requisite natural gifts, while others fail in taking pains to develop them in their calling. But much remains to-day that is earnest, fresh, devoted, and capable of being helpful to the best informed of us, as also to the most needy soul present. Of course, it is quite true that books, newspapers, and especially broadcasting have the power of exercising to-day some spiritual functions which once were only capable of being achieved through the visible preacher in the local sanctuary. But the whittling down of the kinds of work which once had to be done in the pulpit or they were not done at all, does not affect the fact that the office of the Christian preacher is still unique and essential to the maintenance of religion and spirituality. What Phillips Brooks said about it will always be true:

Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men. It has in it two essential elements, truth and personality. Neither of those can it spare and still be

preaching. The truest truth, the most authoritative statement of God's will, communicated in any other way than through the personality of brother man to men is not preached truth.<sup>1</sup>

What is it that differentiates preaching from the communication of truth from a lecturer's desk by a scientist or geographer?

The difference is a spiritual mystery, but it is a quite indubitable reality. Men sense the authority of the experience of the preacher, as long ago in Capernaum they recognized in the words and personality of Jesus 'A new teaching—and with authority'. As a man travelling home by a night train wakens from sleep to know immediately that he has reached his native countryside, there is a power of swift acquaintance in us which stirs to recognize reality in religion. We sense its costliness: we know its sincerity. Even though unconscious of it until now, when we are already being satisfied, we are hungry souls, and at the Word as it breaks upon our ears, we look up and are fed.

The office of genuine preaching is thus intrusive. That is when God uses it uniquely to bring us His love in new and hitherto unapprehended ways. It invades the deepest privacy of the human heart with its authentic call. It is through preaching that the unexpected happens—and precisely because, as we listen, we are brought into the living communion of the Church.

The results of preaching will remain unpredictable, and the course of the preaching itself is unknown to the hearer. Fundamentally, both the preacher and the listener are believers in the deepest of all religious truths, that God is always seeking to communicate with His children. While it may be true, as von Hugel was fond of insisting, that *at our best* we are only as infants crying for the light and with no language but a cry, yet the range of our language and the

<sup>1</sup> Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching* (Allenson), 1.

depth of our capacity to receive it, throw into bolder relief those spiritual realities which are as yet inexpressible. The preacher makes that strain of the spirit more easeful. There is a meaning which lies beyond the mere word-value of what is said. There is a music as well as a definition in it as in poetry. We believe in the possibility of a preacher's inspiration. We expect it. We think that he ought to have for us something which is distinctively from God and not simply of his own contriving. We want, not an essay, but a Divine declaration. This is that 'true preaching of the Word of God in the which God has revealed Himself to us'. After the preacher has humanly and sincerely done his best in preparation, God adds to it.

This is an intrusion upon ourselves and we receive it. We may even receive it resentfully on occasions, for it may be a word of searching revelation in which we discover ourselves to be very different from what we had thought and hoped. Or it may be a word of vocation, a call to us which we can answer gladly, realizing now what we were born to do and be. The barriers go down and we are possessed by Love. It could not have been foreseen by us, and it could not have been foreseen completely by any preacher. It is a use of preacher and listener in which the grace of Christ comes to us in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

When we come to partake of the Lord's Supper, all manner of new and deeper shades of meaning may break through into our souls, but the mode of their coming is well known. We know the course of the service, and the appropriate responses of our minds and hearts are not completely unfamiliar. It is otherwise when we listen to a man of God speaking to his people. Here is 'the angel that troubles the waters'. Are we spiritually asleep? We may be awakened. Have we been unchaste? We may be aware of it now for the first time. Have we finished one stretch of our course and are wondering what is next to be attempted? Here we may receive clear sight of our next goal.

I have fastened upon this intrusive element of the Word as being necessary to us and typical of the function of preaching as a means of grace because, more than in any other way, I have recognized its value in my own life and been made aware of it in the lives of others. Beyond all the other recognized ways of approach to men's souls by the Holy Spirit of God, I see the immense value of the preacher's vocation in winning men and women for Christ and His cause.

Towards the end of his ministry, Alexander Whyte, the very epitome of the Protestant prophet preacher, but also a great lover of Holy Communion, remarked that he looked upon his time as being increasingly a pilgrimage from one Communion to the next. Whyte was thinking, of course, of the quarterly Communion Service as it was observed in his Presbyterian Church. His great congregation probably never shared consciously that inner conviction. What they did know, and what thousands of people know still, is that they are sustained by the messages which they have heard from their preachers on Sunday for the march of the ensuing week. They literally count upon it as a soldier counts upon his rations. Such faith is justified.

It is especially by the preaching of God's Word that souls are recruited for Christ's Church and service. This much would be recognized, I suppose, by most Christians.

When the Methodist of this generation sings, 'O for a thousand tongues to sing', he is not, as his grandfather was, one of a great congregation, the vast majority of whom were suddenly or dramatically converted at a preaching service, and publicly demonstrated 'The triumph of His Grace'. But if inquiry is made among the folk who faithfully serve Christ and know His grace as indubitably as their ancestors did, it will be found that the Sacrament of the Word is still playing the great role of bringing souls into awakened knowledge of who is their Lord. This comes very obviously to the notice of a minister in his pastoral

contacts with men and women. He knows that by this means the Sower still passes up and down the field of human life and experience. Often the preacher of the living Word does not himself know what has happened in the life of someone in the pews in front of him. But a minister making a call years afterwards, learns of the way in which Christ became real and present that night to a young man or girl who was at the parting of the ways. All their subsequent joy in life and service to men were due to that secret spiritual process.

The preaching of the Word is an offering of Christ as the present Saviour. The Lord is lifted up that all men may look to Him and be saved, according to their need. This brings a deep and happy belief in as real a Presence of Christ as any that can be experienced. In the congregation of the faithful, 'The Lord is risen indeed'. People do not necessarily remember the precise words that have been spoken. Men who sneer at the way in which forgetfulness can follow swiftly upon utterance that has held the attention of worshippers for a quiet half-hour in church on a Sunday evening miss the real point of this spiritual fellowship. We do not listen simply to pass an examination, as some students do in universities. There is instruction to be given, but the secret power is not in that; it is in a 'mystical union' which is achieved, and though three days afterwards most of the hearers might not be able to recall the detail of the sermon, the reality of their fellowship with Christ would remain. Who was the preacher who spoke the word on the night that young Spurgeon was converted, and what was his text? I do not know. But I do know, and all the world has benefited from the fact, that there and then a life was called by Christ, and His grace was given.

The fellowship of other worshippers gives strength to our will as we hear the Word, a realization that one is not alone in essaying new paths which show clearly now as the way God intends for us. Many of our humblest people

while listening and worshipping have received as keen a sense of vocation as Wordsworth ever experienced. Like him, they could say:

I felt that I must be, else sinning greatly,  
A dedicated spirit.

But whereas he, with the peculiar, native power of spirit which makes a poet most formidable when alone, was walking among the mountains on his way home from a dance, most of us need the help, the example, and the company of our fellows. And that we find in a preaching service. Such evidence has been given me, not only by other people, but by the way in which Christ has met the needs of my own life through this means of grace, that I know it is of His intention and by His direction that this spirituality is offered to us. And it is not only that the intrusion of His Word comes to us in the days of youth when we are in need of being awakened to new vocation and loyalty. The preaching of the Word is necessary for our maintenance as efficient servants. It educates, it inspires, it corrects us. We have perhaps been unaware of a bias which has been developing in our nature. A secret sin has grown, like a wind-blown seed of willow-herb that lodges, takes root, and spreads. We did not know it until vision was made ours at the hearing of the Word. Best of all, the portals of our spirit are opened by God's Word to the sunlight and the air of heaven after a stifling week of drudgery in the smoke and din.

All this sustenance of spiritual kind, it may be said, could come by other means of direction. I doubt it. There is value but also danger in concentration upon the individual, such as is given in private interviews. These have their place, a rightful and necessary place, especially for the rectifying of difficulties and the enlightenment of the mind. But God means men to be largely responsible for their own normal health of spirit, as they are responsible for the



satisfaction of their normal appetites and the care of their bodies. They must bring personal sincerity and readiness for instruction. But the care of our own souls cannot be laid mechanically upon a priest; it is a relationship between ourselves and God. The speaker of the Word that helps us is God's instrument of communication.

There is consequently nothing infallible in this way of God to men. The rivers of His grace are truly rivers. They find their course where they can most easily flow. It is by the sweet persuasiveness of the divine argument that men best open their arid hearts to love's approach.

People who come well satisfied that nothing need be done for them will probably most readily find fault with the sermon. But the hungry of spirit, the folk in need of solace, uplifting, or chastening, will discover that the Word of the Lord will not fail them. 'The poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst: I, the Lord, will answer them, I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.'

## CHAPTER VII

### THE PRIVATE WAY

WE have considered the importance and essential nature of two great, continual means of grace by which we should grow in spiritual power, and advance into that freedom which is the glad service of God. These means are obtained in public, communal acts. They belong to the worship of the universal Church, and especially are practised on Sundays and the great festivals. But there are some three hundred odd days in the year when we are left quite properly to fend for ourselves. It is one of the consequences of the practical application of belief in the priesthood of all believers that a man is made ultimately responsible for the conduct of his inner life. Without such noble but tremendous responsibility laid upon us, we should remain in perpetual childhood. A time comes, as St. Paul remarks, when the spiritual nature requires meat and not milk.

There are two aspects of devotional life to which, in conjunction with our constant loyalty to the receiving of the Sacrament and the Word, we should give daily heed. They are prayer and reading. Perhaps 'reading' seems to many people an attempt to pin down too precisely the method by which certain functions of the soul are to be stimulated and sustained. We can return to that later. Of the importance of private prayer there ought to be no dispute.

'When thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret' (Matthew vi. 6). Our Lord, in those words, has expressed what is a spiritual axiom for all Christians. The 'inner chamber' may be a mountain top—and it certainly was sometimes the Carpenter's shop in Nazareth. It may be an office where an overworked man, staying on to bring his work up to date, kneels for a moment, or, again, it may be behind a

counter or a haystack, in an open boat at sea or a trench under fire. It is not the precise place about which our Saviour is concerned, but the habit, the disposition of mind and life on our part. The great point He makes is that there must be secrecy about our prayer-life as well as obvious, public service. And prayer must be frequent and natural. This is true of human relationship—friendship and love claim intimacy and quietness if they are to grow. Similarly, the grace of Christ and the love of God come freely into our human nature, and we know the fullness of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit as we withdraw deliberately from men to be with God. There is no other way than this way of prayer.

We are either less convinced about this to-day than our fathers were or else we are more shy and do not readily talk of our experiences in prayer and meditation. But wherever a glimpse is afforded, through intimate conversation with anybody who is fruitful in religious practice, always the essential basic nature of private devotion is revealed. Of course, prayer of an elementary kind is more common than many of us suspect. But the intermittent prayer of the heart which is suddenly impressed by danger or anxiety is very different from the intercourse which is evoked by daily habit. One has only to contrast the impulse of people to pray during the evacuation from Dunkirk and again on 'D-Day' or the first week of the invasion of France with the regular prayer-life of the true Christian, to denote the essential difference between the casual and the constant worshipper.

Yet, in all charity, it is legitimate to suspect that private prayer does not occupy the place it should in the lives of those who are among the most eager for the welfare of the Church, and spend much of their time serving at her tables. We admit the necessity of prayer, and promptly set ourselves to find the best substitute for it. Or, admitting its beauty and necessity, we aim at compression in order to leave more time for committee meetings, letter-writing

administrative duties—anything, in fact, on which we can legitimately ask God's blessing in prayer, so long as that prayer does not much curtail the time that will be left for our purely human endeavours. So we hold to the theory that private prayer, the devotional life, is essential; and in practice we try to bypass it.

'Work is prayer', says the old Latin tag; but we need to recognize the converse truth, that if we are to pray properly it involves work. We are not thinking of the rigorous habits of prayer imposed upon a monk when we see the point of that remark. It is literally the truth that the people most naturally spontaneous in prayer are those who have long years of loving, devotional labour behind them as the resources from which they draw the riches which we poorer and shallower people envy as a gift. This does not rule out the fact that there are some people who, by their very nature, are endowed with superlative spiritual faculties. But no one of us is excluded from the commandments of Christ, and among these commandments comes the injunction to pray. We should not overlook the fact that prayer is accounted, not as something aesthetic and superimposed upon the religious life as a dispensable ornament, but as the muscle of its practical nature.

We must, first of all, become convinced of this absolutely indispensable place prayer occupies in the Christian life if we are ever to grow strong in it. The desire to pray will not spring up overnight like a mushroom. Love of prayer and the high joy to be found in it will only come as we increasingly recognize its value through our practice and experience.

How can the initial desire be awakened? It must come through clear and certain vision of the unique place taken by prayer in the lives of those whom we would sincerely emulate. St. Paul says that we should covet the spiritual gifts, and the capacity for hero-worship which is in us all comes to its most useful purpose when it prompts us to

imitate those whom we most admire. It should be sufficient to say:

This is the way the Master went,  
Should not the servant tread it still?

But, as a matter of fact, we take a lot of convincing before we commit ourselves seriously to the life of prayer, and we can easily lapse from it. The worst kind of lapsing is that which consists of the apparent maintenance of private devotion, when we continue to spend time over our books or our prayers, but the deep sense of its value has waned in us.

We shall not escape periods of aridity, discouragement, drudgery. No great spirit has ever given its inmost thoughts to us concerning the life of prayer that did not speak of these menacing periods. 'The dark night of the soul' and 'dryness'—these words are descriptive of the experiences of the least of us as well as the greatest. And evil is never more subtle in its activity against us than when it suggests we are merely suffering from a normal, discouraging phase in spiritual development. We should awaken as to mortal peril in every time of spiritual dearth. When we simply expect the passage of time to renew meaning and vitality in our prayer without bestirring ourselves at all in the matter, the battle is going against us, and we are not aware of it.

The desire for prayer does not begin with 'prayer for prayer's sake'. That is a shibboleth as absurd as 'art for art's sake'. Prayer, whenever it is encountered in the New Testament, is related to life—the life within and the life without. As appetite is a healthy awakening of the body in expression of its needs for more vitality, prayer is a means of obtaining that abundant life which Christ has promised to all who follow Him.

The desire for prayer will become stronger and stronger in us as we recognize that this is literally the only way by which our lives can have any chance of becoming like those

lives which we love for their nobility, strength, and joy in successful Christian discipleship. It must be truly positive and attractive, not negative and repressive. Given the greatness of the attractiveness, we shall not flinch from the hardness of the labour. It is so in other spheres. The way to producing a glorious show of flowers in one's own garden often comes through healthy emulation of a friend's success. I hope it does not seem too trifling a comparison to make if I set the devotional life beside the toil of our few leisure hours in our gardens.

Recently I was admiring a wonderful show of lupins in the garden of a man whose hospitality I was enjoying for a few hours. I have never seen in a private garden such variety of colour, ranging from deepest indigo to apricot and cerise, with prolific spikes of bloom. So, being myself a lover of lupins, I asked him how he went about it—admittedly with a faint heart, though inquiring mind, for my time is small and the tenure of a Methodist minister is so uncertain that, if he would be certain of gay colours, he had far better stick to nasturtiums and marigolds, which I think God gave to the world specially for the benefit of itinerant ministers in town manses. But I have always wanted a magnificent herbaceous border. My friend had cultivated his garden for some twenty years or more. He said that the subsoil had been unsatisfactory, and so he had dug it all out, replacing it with mould and turf, which he had brought from a neighbouring field and kitchen garden. He spoke of deep trenching and rich manure, and a complete redigging of the border every four or five years; and—equally important—he then renewed the choicest strains, with new varieties of lupins. Lupins go back quickly to the common blue and white types which I know so well because even I can grow them: there must be the bringing in of new plants if colour is to be rich and varied.

The whole process is a complete analogy of what ought to happen in the life of prayer. When I go to the master-life

and make inquiry, I always get that kind of answer. It does not matter whether the life I am admiring shines resplendent in a Catholic or a Quaker, whether he is ancient or modern. A medieval saint like Francis, lying awake all night and repeating in adoring ecstasy, 'My Lord and my God, my Lord and my God!' is perhaps less likely to awaken the quick enthusiasm of a modern young man intent on social betterment than a hard-working, reforming nobleman like Lord Shaftesbury. But the reformer of factory life, like the founder of the Grey Friars, knew that process of trenching and digging, of self-examination and amendment, of planting new strains of meaning in the inner life. All this can only come into life as we obey that primary rule of religion given to us once for all by Christ, and practised assiduously by Him all His days, so that even the Cross became an inner room where He spoke with His Father. We must enter every day into the inner chamber, though that room may only be the privacy of our own thoughts, whither we can withdraw while seated in a crowded train. I recall that one of the finest men I ever had the privilege of knowing in this matter of spiritual knowledge and variety told me that he owed his joy in religion to the careful use of odd quarters of an hour spent in Tubes, buses, and trams.

What happens in the inner room? What do we attempt there?

The first injunction is to 'shut the door'. We must exclude the world if we would include God. We must shut out the press of affairs, the noise of the world's traffic, and be shut in with God. We are to remember that God is with us. Professor A. N. Whitehead's phrase, 'Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness', has its best meaning for the man who knows the mysterious reality of the communion of his own spirit with God in the quiet place.

Do not let us delude ourselves into expecting that this immediately and always brings a sense of deliverance and

joy, of that rapturous singing of the heart caught into words by Charles Wesley:

Thou Shepherd of Israel, and mine,  
The joy and desire of my heart,  
For closer communion I pine,  
I long to reside where Thou art.

In the old detailed instructions for private prayer the beginner was confronted with the long ordeal of the Purgative Way, and then the equally long climb of aspiration in the Contemplative Way, before he could expect to win the sense of oneness with God, the Unitive Way, which Wesley there reveals. But God frequently puts aside the man-made maps of pilgrimage and lifts us away from the dusty road and the hard foot-slogging. Sometimes there breaks in upon even the tardiest of us, the most earth-bound, that wonderful sense of religion's power:

There, there on eagle wing we soar,  
And time and sense seem all no more;  
And heaven comes down our souls to greet,  
And glory crowns the mercy-seat.

I do not give much for that man's experience of prayer who has never known the exciting and compelling emotion of which our great hymns speak. There is a rapture in the meeting of the soul with God akin to the joy of the return of a son or husband from a far field of battle. But if every wife, every day, were to greet her man on his safe return by the 5.35 train from town with the same eager, shining love as she revealed when he came back battle-scarred from Italy or Africa, it would be a little untrue to the general tone and healthy conduct of the happiest married life.

Religion gives to us our highest and most convincing proof of God's love. It also gives to us our normal, healthy, happy relationship; and this belongs to the daily practice of our devotion. But it is not simply a matter of ecstatic



feeling, or of emotional disturbance. When we go into the quiet place, it should be our first thought to remind ourselves that God is there. Just as we can deliberately recollect that we are breathing air, and so are using our lungs, though in a normal atmosphere, without strain or hurry, we are unaware of their function, it is a piece of initial spiritual wisdom for the mind to be used in a simple act of will and reminder. 'Lo, God is here.' We have shut the door on the world, and we turn in thought to that foundation truth of all our being.

The most immediate result will probably be, not the complete absence of noise, but its presence. We have shut the door, physically and materially, if we are lucky enough to be at home with a room for ourselves into which we can go and be free from interference from outside. We have shut the door on our recent occupations, or we think we have. But now we hear those noises which cannot be shut out physically—the internal noises proceeding from the inward life which it is precisely our purpose now to cultivate. Desires, memories, temptations, picturesque and inviting by their appeal to the imagination, all the crowd-scenes of that never-ending and always fascinating film of which we only have the private view, the film of our life, these are much more really before us than the thoughts of God. We try to stop them, to stifle them. But panic increases within us: the thoughts flutter and press like birds driven to the far corner of a cage. There is only one thing to be done. Let them out! When the door on the outer world is shut, there is another door which must be opened; and it is now we shall be wise to recall in a new sense that God is here. As the writer of the letter to the Hebrews reminds us: 'All things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.' God, who is already here with us, is looking on these same jostling, crowded figures that are disturbing our quiet. Once we recognize that constant and mighty fact, which has to do with all our

living, and especially with our private life of devotion, we can let the busy thoughts press upwards into our minds and so out of them into freedom of escape. It is absurd to think that we can get quietness by sheer repression. The common attitude of irritated suppression is fatal. The remark, 'You be quiet in this tram or I'll knock your 'ead off!' with which a red-faced woman only succeeded in making her small boy heave convulsively, to the great discomfort of fellow passengers, simply will not do. Control, yes; but not violent repression. The mind that is full of wandering thoughts must acknowledge that it is full of wandering thoughts—these must be the elements of its first prayers. Resentments, temptations, amusements, worries, all change their tempo and their character as we give them leave to escape under the watchful eye of our Saviour. Here is the grace of Christ, transmuting and dismissing the affairs of our lives.

We can now turn to a few ways of helpful, constructive use of our time and energy. This is not by any means an attempt to treat exhaustively the whole care of the inner life, but only a few hints of what can most easily and helpfully be practised by any man or woman. They are of the most elementary and necessary kind.

We should be ready to receive help from those whom God means to help us, our forerunners in the Faith; and this brings us to the matter of reading meditatively. First and foremost and always we must be people who read the Bible, and read it, so to speak, 'on our knees'. This is the Word of God speaking home to our hearts and minds from the experiences of His children who lived in far-off days, but endured precisely the same hopes and fears, daily journeyings and joyous arrivals which we may know, and our children after us. A psalm, a few verses from an Epistle, a parable from a Gospel, will bring to us precisely that sweet compulsion, that intrusion of something which is already God's of which we stand in such need. The daily, devotional use of the Bible is indispensable. I am not thinking primarily

of study, but of devotion. There are many different aids to Bible-reading available in these days which can prevent even the most unlearned of us from spending our time in the least profitable way. And there is much to be said for the frequent use of the most familiar books, Psalms, Second Isaiah, the Gospels and Epistles; for in them lies the inexhaustible treasure of the spiritual life. The selection of Psalms and Scripture given in the *Methodist Hymn-book* alone would give a course for daily meditation which would provide variety of thought and meditation for nearly three months. This giving heed to what is said to us before we commit ourselves to personal prayer has received the blessing of the spiritually wise in every generation. We might almost say that the rule of childhood, 'Do not speak until you are spoken to', applies here; but not because God is forbidding, aloof, reluctant to be bothered with our little requests and panic-stricken worries. On the contrary, we come into the quiet place because we have remembered, on the greatest authority in the world of life, that God who keeps the stars in their courses also marks the fall of the young starling down there in my garden, fluttering about, trying his wings, and that little child running to school with her satchel bobbing up and down, and the silent spilling of scarlet petals from a poppy she has brushed with her hand. It is this complete familiarity of God with all our ways that should make us the readier to listen.

We ought not to be the victims of monotony. Intelligence and desire, thoughtfulness, and what we genuinely feel should direct our course.

In this connection, there should be a place for definitely devotional reading. We are often most quickly arrested and interested by a few sentences from the masters of the spiritual life. Again, at the risk of repetition, let us remember that we are not primarily thinking of information, study. We do need to read religious books; and it is perhaps a curious sign of the times that, while there is still a big

demand for some popular religious writings, the demand comes from only a few of our churchgoing people. The cinema and the radio between them have filched away much of the valuable time which once would have been given to reading; and reading is still incomparably the best means of acquiring permanence of knowledge. But in connection with devotional life there are a few books which claim such a high place that we know they are above the changes of the hurrying generations. There are modern books which are very useful—they can be found in good bookshops; but I am thinking now of a few source-books which come next to the Bible in the glorious work that they have done. Of these Augustine's *Confessions*, à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*, and Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, are chief. Their slightly archaic language is no barrier: they are vivid, real with complete sincerity, and 'most current for that they come home to men's business and bosoms'. The time will never come when these have no further word to speak to us of exhortation and reproof, of explanation and exposure: they are of the treasure of that Kingdom of God which is within.

Turning from what we may reasonably call our receptive devotions to our active prayers, again we shall be confronted with our own poverty. 'I don't know what to say; I don't even know what I ought to think.' In some such words, most of us can readily confess our own ineffectiveness and poverty. Let us boldly invoke the help of great prayers. Of course, there is an overlapping between what we have just been mentioning—the devotional reading which is so necessary—and our speaking to our Heavenly Father. Life defies complete analysis into functions and departments. Complete analysis can only be carried out on things and dead forms whence life has fled. It therefore only gives an approximate idea concerning the interplay of the various parts of our nature. If we could talk and think about several, separate matters all at once we should be better able

to represent the complexity of the inner life; but that is impossible. We have to impose an apparent sequence of time, a succession of events, actions, desires, petitions, thanksgivings, where, in actuality, all are so closely related that sometimes they are almost perfectly synchronized.

How can we best learn to speak to 'our Father which is in secret'? The life of prayer is the superb test of self-expression, and although very much can be done in silence without words, there is the danger of falling into merely sentimental attitudes of life as well as of posture. While prayer passes far beyond the reach of words, and never can be fully contained in words, not even in those of the great artists in devout expression, words—let us face the fact—are necessary. We truly do not know how to pray as we ought; and always there is the magnificent certainty that the Spirit Himself supplements and conveys the reality of our own intercessions. But the effectiveness of normal prayer, as contrasted with those terrible, soul-shaking times in which grief leaves us speechless as broken suppliants before God, does call for deliberate apprenticeship.

A very candid American soldier told me that he was impressed with the way in which so many more people in English homes gave themselves to deliberate study of music and art than in his own country. He 'guessed' that if it were possible for everyone to learn the piano in ten easy, quick lessons, nearly every home in America would have a piano and use it. But it just could not be done.

He was putting his finger on a very tender spot, and I doubt whether there are so many musical homes in England as he thinks; but the truth is apparent to us. Something in the way of ardent practice is necessary if only elementary, technical skill is to be acquired. And while no one would wish to represent the ways of prayer as being arduous and difficult, there is little sense in shutting our eyes to the necessity of accepting the best guides we can obtain. Prayer is not talking for the sake of talking. We need to know what

it is we should think, or wish to think, and how best to make that concrete and real to our own souls. Of God's own perception of it in its clumsiness and misshapen form, we need not be afraid. We are never going to be judged in prayer as pupils are judged in a musical competition; it is simply that we do see the value and necessity of as perfect self-expression as is possible. What to think and say, and how to say it! Here is our task; and it is one of which we need not be afraid.

Just as, according to the extent and depth of meditation, devout reading and thought, our spiritual resources will be enriched, so, as we come into the company of those who have 'trod the path of prayer' before us, shall we be taught how to pray.

I can only speak effectively from within the living tradition and power of a Methodist experience because it happens that I was given the great good fortune of being born into that part of Christ's Church. Other people, if any such should deign to read these pages, may easily transliterate the next few lines and instances into their own more familiar context. One is only too well aware, and thankful for it, that in these recent years the treasury of the Church's praise in song and prayer has been greatly extended, and Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Anglicans and others, like our Methodist people, have had books compiled for public and private use which are glorious channels of grace and fellowship.

It has often been said that for a Methodist the *Hymn-book* is not merely a manual of sacred song; it is, with the Bible, the chief treasury of his devotional life and his treatise of systematic theology. This kind of judgement has much truth in it, though it is not so true of us to-day as it was of our fathers, partly because our *Hymn-book* to-day is more general and less definitely the peculiar property of a sect than the great book issued by John Wesley. That book made no mistake about its business. It started straight away

'Exhorting Sinners to Return to God'. It was a book 'describing death', 'describing heaven'; it was 'for believers rejoicing', 'for believers interceding'—and I do not know any more direct instruction in the matter of prayer than it lays before the mind. Perhaps part of the fruit of the excellent work done by the late Bernard Manning<sup>1</sup> and Dr. George Sampson's admirable Warton Lecture for 1943 on *The Century of Divine Songs* will be to make Methodists again conscious of that immense wealth tucked away in dusty corners of country chapels and down-town churches where the old books wait for their day of resurrection. But, apart from that, I would be well content if children and young people to-day became thoroughly conversant with the more catholic volume we are now using. Sufficient remains of what is peculiar to Methodism to assure us of the continuance of that direct experience of God without which we have little claim to continue our witness as a denomination. And, mingled with our own incomparable Wesley hymns, there are the newer and older beauties which have come to wide use since the Methodists two hundred years ago taught the English-speaking race the joys of congregational singing. This *Hymn-book* does occupy in the lives of our people the place of the Anglican's *Prayer Book* and the Roman's *Missal*. If one chances upon a hymn-book which has been the property of a Methodist who kept it, where it belongs, in his inner room, the odds are greatly that it will be scoured and marked, the underlining representing the times of stress or rejoicing when he found his best way of speaking to his Heavenly Father in secret in the words he there recited quietly. I have seen such a book, literally worn out, and there were in the margins dates written down prolifically. They could convey no meaning to anybody but the user, for there were no notes; but obviously they marked times of importance when the over-charged soul of that man, long since dead, was given divine easement.

<sup>1</sup> Bernard Manning, *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts* (Epworth Press).

Like much else in life, the problem is partly one of vocabulary; and the *Hymn-book* and great prose prayers give us that range of word and mood by which we are made free of the landscape of the soul.

Next to the *Hymn-book*, I would put the complete *Book of Offices* and *Divine Worship*, the two books which every preacher in Methodism has the right to use in helping his conduct of worship, and which all the people called Methodists should be glad to use because of their excellence. There is much in these books that is common to the whole family of God in its life of the spirit.

I remember attending, through long months of increasing poverty and weakness, an old man in whose face there was always the radiance of divine grace. He grew too feeble and too dim of sight to read, and he sorely missed his books. But he told me that he was thankful that, in the Methodist chapel in which he had worshipped, Morning Prayer was used every Sunday morning, there was frequent Holy Communion, and every Sunday evening there had been a free service with much use of congregational hymns. 'Now,' he said, 'when there is so little I can have or do, and I am completely dependent on other people for anything new, I praise God that my mind is filled with the great thanksgivings and collects, the psalms, and the hymns.' His speech was choice and beautiful with the diction of those matchless acts of prayer in which the human spirit has achieved its finest expression.

*Divine Worship* is not known to our people as widely as it ought to be. It has not come into universal favour for congregational worship, though I suspect that hundreds and hundreds of services every Sunday are enriched and helped by its contents, often without the worshippers' knowledge. It has not the sustained excellence of the *Book of Offices*, but it is acknowledged to be one of the most useful and varied collections of ancient and modern prayers available to people. I hope its use will spread among folk



wanting help in their home life and private prayer, for it not only takes account of the seasons of the soul as they are revealed in the progress of the Christian year; it shows what should be the breadth of our intercessions for others and the shining graces and virtues which only come to our knowledge as we find them desired by the saints, whose prayers we inherit.

There are three other books that I would name out of the multitude of books of prayers, devotions, and intercessions which are so readily available to us in these days for all kinds of people, from students to little children. I mention these three because they have proved their worth now for more than thirty years to a host of Christian people of all types and denominations. Two of them—anthologies—contain the world's richest devotional work, ranging through the several great communions. I refer to Mrs. Tileston's, *Great Souls at Prayer*, which has a prayer or two for every day in the year, and to Dr. Selina Fox's famous collection, *A Chain of Prayer across the Ages*, which contains a vast amount of prayers for morning and evening use as well as special arrangements for the various seasons and times of emergency or rejoicing, and a few litanies. No minister, and very few laymen, can afford to neglect these books, so great is their range and true their note. Of much more intimate and personal character is Dr. Orchard's *The Temple*. It is poetic, suggestive, full of the fragility but persistence of the human spirit which leans upon God's holiness and strength in true prayer. It has the atmosphere which revives us after times of aridity and is deeply individualistic—for 'those who, weary of fruitless quest and endless argument, are willing to try the way of prayer'.

All these, and many others, can help us. There is, indeed, no limit to the ways by which, in the inner room, reality and vitality can be given to us. But all—whether books or flowers, pictures or music—should be but aids: the goal is personal, frank, and humble converse with God. And

therefore it is absolutely essential that we should increasingly pray in our own way and our own speech. Many 'fok may find, as I have done myself, and therefore do not hesitate to commend it, that writing one's own prayers is a most valuable way. We write letters to those we love, and often in the process find a great sense of communion with them. It is not dissimilar when we take pen or pencil that we may utter our deepest love for God and for those whose needs are in our hearts.

It is in the inner room, as nowhere else, that I can let my thoughts take wing in thankfulness for the radiant joy that has come to me, and the brave companionship of unforgettable married love. It is here, since I am insistent, as a man should be, to put his children in the way of bodily health and the finest education attainable, that I should not cease to pray for them. And thus the circle widens past the great events of the home and the life, the sorrows and bereavements that impinge closest upon friends, to those constant tragedies which befall the millions of one's unknown brothers and sisters. The divine argument of prayer must ever reach outwards and upwards from the known to the unknown, as the circle of a fountain falls far and refreshingly from the jet where it is at its intensest in power.

This is the way, and there is no other. It will take us sometimes out of the company of men, and they will miss us and wonder why we do not join them. It is not that we are unsociable. It is that we have at last begun to have a glimpse into the real nature of life and love. The grace of Christ is drawing us, and the love of God is enfolding us. We know that the Church is a company not confined to walls and creeds, but is caught within the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

One afternoon at Abbotsford a host of eager American visitors were pressing the caretaker with questions about this and that. How did he *know* that was a lock of Mary Queen of Scots' hair? And *who* gave Sir Walter Scott that

particular piece of armour? Pestered on every side, the poor man looked at me with mingled sorrow and indignation. Then, pointing to a stair leading out of the room, he said: 'That is the stair by which Sir Walter used to escape from his company when he had private work to do.' And then he turned and whispered to me: 'I'm thinking, sir, that he'd be wanting to gang up it now, if he was here!'

We have a private work to do. It is not of the world's kind, nor is it in the world's power to restrain or frustrate it. It is the Christian's work, and those who do it come to glad realization of what God's near presence means. They know the truth, amid life's adventures and rebuffs, that 'Religion is Adoration'. They are at ease in the silence which belongs to communion which goes past sound and speech. They know why Moses' face shone as he came down from the mountain, and how it was that the disciples saw the form of Jesus transfigured as He prayed. Some such light has fallen about them where they prayed, unknown to other men; and they have found that heaven's frontiers come strangely near the places where men strive and toil.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE LOVE OF GOD CREATING

WHAT do we mean when we use the phrase, 'The love of God'?

It is impossible for us to answer that question without bringing to it the richness of our experience of the grace of Christ.

For God has other words for other worlds,  
But, for this world, the word of God is Christ.

It is by all that Christ is to us, by what He has done and almost by that alone, we understand that God is love.

Certainly we should be prepared to accept what the great disciples say of God's nature; and the longer we ourselves essay the tasks of Christian living, the more readily do we take their judgements as being true. We understand the value of their authority more and more fully as the years pass. But we accept St. John's word that God is love, and St. Paul's that nothing can separate us from the love of God because we, like them, are immediately reminded of Christ. Very few of us can think in abstractions, and some of the people who use abstract language are not masters of it. We cannot think of love as an abstraction because we know it has to do with life. It is a picture word. To use it is to see life in terms of people. And this is precisely the plane on which Jesus is eager to meet us. It was first of all in the contacts He made with men and women, Peter hauling in his net after a night's fishing, Martha bustling in and out of her kitchen, the centurion puzzled and sad about his boy-servant, that He showed them the application of His teaching. Because of what He was to them, 'that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life', they knew God was love.

Love they had previously known in part in their happiest friendships and homes; but here was love in action, consistent where they were inconsistent, patiently strong, not subject to the intermittence and gustiness of mood so deplorably prevalent in human love. In fact, the love of God as they first knew it in Christ, and which was continued among them after He had risen from the dead, was so decisively and definitely different that they had to find a new word for it. Unfortunately in English we cannot use their new word. We have to use the same word 'love', whether we are speaking of a film from Hollywood that is saturated with emotion of the worst kind, for the pure affection of a mother for her child, or the adoration of a saint for what God has done for him. But, if we cannot have a new word, we can fill the old word with the right Christian content. Love in God, the love of God for men, became increasingly the theme of the first Christian preachers; and it has continued to be the theme of Christians ever since. It belongs to no one else. Some of the fruits of God's love—for example, care for the poor and unfortunate—have been appropriated by other teachings, especially in social and political doctrines. But we scarcely needed two wars within thirty years to prove to us the impossibility of love for man without the enriching knowledge of God's love. It is not something to be known with the mind alone like a proposition of Euclid which, once grasped, is known for ever and cannot be altered. Yet it is to be known with the mind as well as with the heart (using that word in its common religious sense to denote the lasting part of us that feels and moves us by its unique dynamic).

O Love divine, how sweet Thou art!  
When shall I find my willing heart  
All taken up by Thee?

Charles Wesley was not shutting off part of his nature in that prayer. Knowledge of the mind, activity of the will,

directness of conduct, the prose, the bread-and-butter of life, as well as the poetry and the nectar, are all gathered together in the Christian experience of love. And Christians are people who are expected to know more and more of this spiritual love as they grow in years. By the grace of their risen Lord, and by the unfailing power they find in communion with the Holy Spirit, they come to know this central mystery and reality of their religion, which is the love of God.

There are four ways in which we may usefully think of God's love as it will be unfolded to us. These are but four of the infinite gradations of God's relationship to His children as they discover it. They are Scriptural, they are of the Faith as it has always been received and practised, and they are indispensable. To think upon the treasure of God's gift of love to us as we find it in discipleship to His Son, is to know that God's love is creative. But it is also corrective. It redeems what is lost, and it has purpose for the least and lowliest of us as for the greatest and most important folk according to our human scale of assessment.

Here, then, are four points for constant meditation—the two major facts of love creating and redeeming, the minor ones of correction and purpose. But before we think of them, let it be once more recalled that all the qualities of God's love are blended inextricably. We, sometimes by the urgent necessity of our human circumstances, and sometimes by the limitation of our minds, must take in sequence or separately what is really simultaneous. We are made in a certain way and are bound accordingly. As W. H. Hudson once strikingly observed, a chameleon can lie still on a twig and with one eye appear to be in a blissful day-dream while with the other he follows the flight of a fly which will surely provide him with his next titbit if it alights within six or seven inches of his inert body. That questing eye swivels round and the glutinous tongue will flash out quicker than the fly can take-off; and yet only part of the chameleon's life

seems to be in action. It is not given to us to be capable of seeing and fixing our attention on more than one object at a time. Whatever I am doing requires all my attention if it is to be done well. So when I am playing golf, both my eyes must be riveted on the ball if I am to drive it 200 yards down the fairway or only to putt it two feet into the hole. As soon as I have played a shot I am released from that tension and can enjoy the landscape, the wild flowers, the cloud-shadows and bird-song, the conversation of companions. Some such alternation occurs in the spiritual life as we seek to know the love of God. The functions of His love appear to us to vary; but the love which is creative, as we see it when a child is born, is the secret of the same God who, later in that child's life, may recall him as a prodigal from the far lands. God is always one and the same, light undimmed, truth unalterable, love eternal. Creation is being effected by the God of whom we also speak as our Redeemer. All these phrases are men's attempts to make clear to themselves the most fascinating and long-lasting reality with which they have to do—their experience of God in life.

In this necessary sequence, we begin with the reminder that it is from God's love our life springs, and without Him there is no life. The first sentence of each of the two great creeds of Christendom brings us face to face with this truth: 'I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth' (*Apostles' Creed*). 'I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, And of all things visible and invisible' (*Nicene Creed*). But the roots of this thought of God's love run much farther back into the past. We find them early in the Bible; but especially we see them in the worship of the Psalmists. 'When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, The moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that Thou visitest him?' (Psalm viii. 3-4). 'I will give thanks unto Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: Wonderful are Thy

works; And that my soul knoweth right well. My frame was not hidden from Thee, When I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth' (Psalm cxxxix. 14-15).

That is the way in which the worship of God begins for many of us. It is what Ralph Hodgson, a modern singer in this strain, calls 'The Song of Honour':<sup>1</sup>

I heard the Universal Choir  
The Sons of Light exalt their Sire  
With universal song.

There is deep, unfailing joy in this recognition that 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; The world, and they that dwell therein' (Psalm xxiv). Religion begins with awe in the presence of the Creator Spirit; but it can remain low and crude, primitive and cruel, reflecting in the lives of men the terror that grips their souls.

This dark fear of the elder gods, together with the sunlit fables of Greek mythology, may have been so remote from the lives of many people brought up in English homes that it has seemed incredible to them that real men and women, working at looms or furnaces, in ships or fields, could have seriously given thought to them. But the wild terror which has smitten our cities by night, and the long nightmare of suspense and fear before war started, have given us understanding of the primitive dread of the powers that seemed to be behind Nature and the events of history. These fears and questionings which make some people wild and careless in the face of an inscrutable destiny, and others hag-ridden with worry and superstition, are a challenge to the Christian.

It is not obvious—and it is no use pretending otherwise—that God is love. If ocular demonstration is asked for or the clinching logic of the schoolman, the proof of the law courts, or the tests of the physical scientist, the love of God

<sup>1</sup> Ralph Hodgson, *Poems* (Macmillan & Co.).



is not demonstrable. And yet it is the surest thing in all the world, as well as the greatest, 'to them that love God'. Because they were sure of it, early Christians died in the arena at Rome, and Pastor Niemöller went into a concentration camp in Nazi Germany. Thereby they literally followed in the footsteps of Love that was crucified on Calvary.

We have to make certain assumptions in life. We are making them continually. An assumption is an act of faith. We completely trust ourselves to what we believe to be ultimate truth. It is that which opens up to us our worlds of possibility. So a child assumes that she can learn to ride a bicycle, and speedily proceeds to do it with dexterity and grace. She assumes the possibility because she is assured of it by the word of her mother, whom she trusts, and by the example of people she has seen riding. There is something infectious about faith, even in little things such as learning to walk or riding a bicycle. And it is not otherwise with Christian living. It richly deserved its earliest name of 'The Way', if only because it was revealed in this twofold infectious sense by the authority of believers and by their example.

The revelation of God in the Bible has much to say, by implication, of His love for men, even in the earliest books; but the love becomes more and more explicit as men prove repeatedly the rightness of their spiritual assumptions, until finally it becomes completely shown in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. By His Word, by His whole example in teaching and bearing amid the diverse circumstances of life, and especially through the fellowship with Him that is ours in the Church, we become increasingly sure that the God who made us is Love.

The Christian is mindful every day of the duty and obligation laid upon him by the fact that he did not make himself, and he cannot determine his own end (except by the wilful sin of suicide). He meditates continually upon the mystery of creation and sees it to be the action of love.

It is sometimes said in disparagement of Christians to-day that they have been too eager to look upon the sunny aspects of life and too unready to face its darkness. They have made religion a motor-trip to the coast, with bathing and picnic-baskets, where their fathers made it a pilgrimage, only to be undertaken with sore-footed labour and hunger, away from this world to a heaven which, at best, they would hardly win, for the chances of falling into the smoke and fire of hell made the odds heavy against them. This is a criticism too sweeping and drastic. Yet it is true that the praise of God for this world and joy in His creation of it have to-day usurped the dominant position once occupied by grim thoughts of the Last Judgement. One can still talk with old people whose childhood was touched with fear because of the continual reference to the after-life by preachers, and the remoteness of their chance of escaping eternal punishment unless they could certainly claim to have been saved in a most decisive manner. The farther back we go, the more such dread appears in popular religion. Does any child now tremble and quake as Martin Luther once did at the great portrayals which could be seen in wall-paintings and coloured glass?

Luther tells us that when he was a boy in the parish church his childish imagination was inflamed by the stained-glass picture of Jesus, not the Saviour, but the Judge, of a fierce countenance, seated on a rainbow, and carrying a flaming sword in His Hand. This idea prevented pious people who held it from approaching Jesus as an intercessor.<sup>1</sup>

The same kind of portrayal is to be found surviving from the Middle Ages in some of our old parish churches, as, for instance, at delightful Fairford, in the Cotswold country; but the children to-day are not terrified by it. Why?

<sup>1</sup> T. M. Lindsay, article on 'Luther' in *Cambridge Modern History*, vol. II.

Because children now are directed to 'behold the beauty of the Lord in the land of the living'—and it is no bad start, for it is truer to the example of Christ's own teaching.

The characteristic appeal of religion to-day does not lie in thrusting judgement of a penal kind into the forefront. We may with some justice be accused of lack of balance by allowing the possibility of the total disappearance of judgement of any kind. It is surely right to pray, as we do:

That by the Inspiration of Thy Loving Spirit we may direct the thoughts of our children through curiosity to wonder, through fairies to angels, through the imagination of the delights of playtime to the worship of the joys of the Eternal.<sup>1</sup>

The windows and mural decorations to be seen in our best modern churches and chapels, especially of schools and colleges, are productive of this happier reverence in the presence of 'the Maker of heaven and earth'. An excellent example is the work of Mr. Harold Speed, whose pictures of land and seashore, farm-girls and ploughmen, fishermen and women with children, rabbits, sheep grazing, flowers, adorn the chapel of Wesley House, Cambridge. This love, which is always to be with us, reaches down to the least and lowliest. It was a fine piece of suggestive art which prompted someone to hang a miner's lamp in the chapel so that the sunlight and blue hills of Mr. Speed's pictures should not tempt the praying man in Cambridge to forget the ugliness, noise, and darkness which must be the setting of daily toil for so many of God's children, without whose labour life would be impossible.

Religion which thus puts us in mind of God's creative love is completely inclusive. It will range from what is magnificent and sublime, like Kangchenjunga rearing up, a dazzling white peak under the Eastern sky, to the coolie

<sup>1</sup> *Acts of Devotion. On the Grace of Childhood.* (S.P.C.K.).

carrying a heavy pack through jungle and forest at its foot, or even to the flies which pester him as he walks—‘the Lord God made them all.’

That is our faith, and therein, as we have already hinted, lies our problem. It is easier to show the beauty of creation than the love which prompts it and maintains it. And the Christian will not always be able to say with easy certainty that God is good. In Gethsemane, He who taught us all to pray, ‘Thy Will be done’, was caught into an agony of sorrow and temptation. The temptation was to escape, to keep in human possession for a few more years the glitter of the lake, the cascades of Jordan leaping into life, the cedars of Lebanon, the companionship of men and women, the labour with wood, so sweet and wholesome in its smell, and the chatter of children looking in at the carpenter’s open door. But God His Father would be lost out of that content of life if He failed to pray and to do His Will. Therefore, Jesus prayed, ‘Not My will, but Thine be done’, and Love went on its way again creatively—as love must often go, through travail, loneliness, death, to life.

We hold to love even in the midst of so many jarring notes, so many seeming denials. The problems of the Book of Job become our own. It was no sudden discovery of Tennyson and his age that Nature could be ‘red in tooth and claw’. We stand on the edge of a wood in springtime where yellow primroses star the ground among the boles of the trees. There is a sudden hurtling of a barred breast, a glimpse of swift wings, hooked beak, sharp talons, and a sparrow-hawk has struck and carried off a chaffinch. Up in the pine-tree the hawk’s brood of ravenous youngsters devour their meal. Down below, in the hawthorn bush, four little unfledged chaffinches wait in vain for their mother, and the cock-bird droops his tail and plumage and mourns with a melancholy ‘Pink-pink, pink-pink’ when he finds against the pale yellow of the primroses a spot of

blood and a few feathers that were his mate's. Maternal care in the hawk has meant the end of maternal care for the brood of chaffinches.

It is only a step from this tragedy of the woodland to craters in our streets where houses stood, and from birds to people who look at one mutely across the open grave, their eyes, not their lips, protesting, 'How?' 'Why?'

But Christians do not shut their eyes to the difficulties and sorrows of this problem. They know the answer is beyond the intellectual skill of man to state; but they do know the answer. More richly than Job, when he had come to peace, because they have looked upon the Cross and the Risen Lord, they can say that they had heard of God with the hearing of the ear, but now they have seen Him. They possess assurance; and the love of God as it has come to them supremely in the fellowship of Jesus Christ and His Church helps them continually to be of good cheer. They acknowledge the reality of evil and of sin. But God is with them. It is they, the Christians, who face all the facts, but they put them into a larger context than this earth and our few years upon it can provide. And from that larger context which is eternal and materially indestructible, they derive their resources by which what can only be described as supernatural power is brought down to transform the tasks and sufferings of men. Creative love does not launch a world into existence and then abandon it until it languishes into death. Much that we call evil, and all that is sinful, is against the will of God. But that does not mean He is defeated or even frustrated. The God who created the earth and all its possibilities shows us the continuity of His creativeness as we see Jesus, His Son, entering our sphere of action:

So Love itself in human form,  
For love of me He came,  
I cannot look upon His face  
For shame, for bitter shame.

We are over-fond of fastening upon the evil for which we are not obviously responsible in our protests that God cannot be love—an earthquake in Turkey, a tidal wave in Japan, a painful disease in a relative—rather than upon a sin for which we are ourselves quite secretly but quite definitely answerable. Complaints made by casual acquaintances in railway trains or hecklers at open-air meetings always accuse God of indifference by citing wars and natural disasters, taking no personal blame. A true Christian reverses the process—and so when he comes face to face with the invasive power of love, in the life and person of his Saviour, Love incarnate in Him, he hangs his head ‘for shame, for bitter shame’. He will go farther, and, leaving the wider realm of creation at large, with the possibility that what he knows as wickedness and evil may have affected processes and modes of life and government of which, in this world, he can have no knowledge, he will fasten upon the sad connection between even such a disaster as a world war and his own private sin. He will go such lengths as to say:

Alas! my treason, Jesu, hath undone Thee;  
’Twas I, Lord Jesu, I it was denied Thee;  
I crucified Thee.

We sing those exquisite words of Bridges’ translation in Holy Week, overlooking the fact that they state the same truth as Charles Wesley’s:

O Jesus, my hope,  
For me offered up,  
Who with clamour pursued Thee to Calvary’s top.

We do not pretend that God’s creative love gives us a passport into an earthly paradise. If we do not dwell upon the Last Judgement as the chief means to produce religion among us, we should not eliminate mention of the dark pains and sinister shadows which do come in life, but face them in the certainty that, if these things were done to Jesus, we can hold by the greatest gift He offers us, the assurance

that God is our Father. So in Mr. Harold Speed's pictures which we have already mentioned, the eye is drawn from one colourful and pleasing sight of this fair earth to another until, at the east end of the Chapel, there comes some formidable and necessary symbolism. There, Man and Woman, naked and helpless, are besieged by 'the old Serpent' whose coils are about the rock on which they kneel; but between them is their offspring, and the Child does not even heed the malevolence of the threat because, in the sky above, he sees 'One like unto the Son of Man', a radiant Redeemer, not a fierce Judge. Deliverance, like creation itself, comes from God. It is a piece of symbolism of perfect congruity for our modern needs that this pictorial confession of man's failure to use his God-given body and mind aright, his love for woman and hers for him, is depicted in the roof immediately above the table of Holy Communion. Where the bread is broken and the wine is poured, there men may remember of what fashion they are, of what strength and weakness, and give themselves again to the creative love apart from which they have no breath or ability either to do the devil's business or to serve God.

When the love of God is with us, we are conscious of this filial, intimate dependence upon His creation which is being continued in us and through us, in this the time of our life.

I know a child who, at the age of five, began to love as her favourite hymn, not the simple lines most small people care for, but Isaac Watts's noble 'I'll praise my Maker while I've breath'. The reason? Partly because she likes the tune; but chiefly because she first sang it in a tiny old Methodist chapel, tucked away among the hills of Derbyshire. There were a dozen or two familiar faces about her, farmers and their wives, her own mother and sister, her father in the quaint little pulpit, and outside, but plainly to be seen or heard through the windows, the green hills, the bleat of a lamb, the cluck of a hen, the burble of running water. This was the world, her happy world.

When John Wesley was dying in City Road at the age of eighty-eight, he looked back over his world; not one of pastoral loveliness, though no man of his century had ridden through our countryside so much. He saw the mobs, the dirt and squalor of Tyneside, Kingswood, the Black Country, the sorrows and the sins of men, but he saw them as they had been gloriously, miraculously transformed by the grace of Christ and the love of God. He also sang:

I'll praise my Maker while I've breath,  
And when my voice is lost in death,  
Praise shall employ my nobler powers.

The face of a Christian, even at the gates of death, is always turned towards the future.

There was a vast difference between the content of those words as used by Wesley and by the little child on holiday. But it is the claim of faith that any child in the world can come to the greatness of Wesley's conviction as the mystery of God's love is revealed through the changing years and scenes. The love which prompts the innocence of childhood to be thankful for life is enhanced as it is learned that God's creation of men involves Him in bringing back the forgetful, the wilful, the rebellious.

'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth'; and in due time, 'Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King'. God's creation at length brings us to adoration for His 'redemption of the world through our Lord Jesus Christ'.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE LOVE REDEEMING

EVERYTHING that is unique in Christian life and worship gathers around the Cross of Jesus. The love of God is focused there for us to see and adore, and, by their faith in Him who suffered, men become 'new creatures'. The old writers used the appropriate metaphor when they spoke of our Lord as 'the Second Adam'; for here creation begins again. This is at the heart of every true proclamation of the Gospel; *this is* the Gospel. Its most classic statement, as also it is the world's most familiar text, exhibited sometimes among the world's glaring advertisements along railway lines and main streets, is St. John's 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved' (John iii. 16-17). This is what differentiates Christianity from what is best in other religions: this is what is necessary to crown and complete Judaism at its finest in the revelation of God contained in the Old Testament. The praise of creation would not be unique in Christianity were it not that the Majesty of God stoops to reclaim what is lost and broken. No other poet but a Christian could sing, as Milton did, of love in God coming in the Saviour who:

here with us to be,  
Forsook the courts of everlasting day  
And chose with us a darksome house of mortal clay.

The Gospel is both the story and the present power of man's redemption. The evidence of its truth is being written to-day in lives transformed in India and London as strangely and certainly as they were when Paul preached in Asia

Minor. The parables about seeking and finding, sowing and reaping, or casting nets into the sea, reveal their truth repeatedly in many lands and ages, among folk of every conceivable, and some inconceivable, types and cultures. The deepest, unfailing joy of our faith lies in this unique experience. And it *is* an experience, something involving our own lives and work. It is personal—and though intended for all, is achieved so diversely and with such infinite accommodations and adjustments, that every Christian, while knowing that God's love is equal and the same for all men, feels it is his own specially intended privilege. The nearest approach that we have to this rich, spiritual knowledge is that of human love at its best. A child feels and knows that all his father's and mother's love is centred upon his own life; but he is equally sure—for he sees signs of it every day—that his brothers and sisters share the same love and yet are just as sure that they have *all* the parental love. It is one of the common ways in which we can learn that the spiritual realities are different from the material, and consumption of them does not impoverish their supply, but tends rather to their increase.

Without this living power of Christ as our Redeemer, the dark shadows of sin and death, as we have already recognized, would obliterate our pride in creation. However we put it into words, we all see that, at least from our own human point of view, much is wrong that should be right. We may choose the old story-form of the first chapters of Genesis as our expression of conviction that the world, and man's life in the world, are not as the good God 'the Lord of every living thing' intends. We may choose the phrases of theologians to explain, as best they can, the meaning of 'the Fall'. But all of us know something of this tragedy, and not one of us knows it *all* or can explain it with complete satisfaction. What we also see and know is the victory which comes through the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it is this which looms so largely in our

minds that, when we think of the blessing of God's love for us, it shapes itself into thought of Christ. Love's strange, redeeming work has been done for us by the Saviour whose grace we have known; and so we become of the fellowship, of the family which continues and propagates the victorious life. 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.'

Wherever we turn, among the agonies of Christians tortured and in mourning, or among their triumphs and rejoicing, we are never far away from this sense of the immensity of 'Christ's strange work'. It is brought to the ears of all who attend a funeral, for example, in the words of St. Paul: 'Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.' And that victory is renewed for every life coming into the grand succession of those who believe. Our hymns never rise to greater heights than when they hold before us the mystery and work of Christ the Conqueror. It is one of the things for which a modern Christian can be thankful that, amid the trials of our generation, we have been drawn back to admire and reproduce in our own kind what early makers of crucifixes and painters depicted as Christ 'reigning from the Tree', not languishing and merely evoking the pity of us passers-by down time's long street, but compelling our worship by His crowned triumph. *Christus Victor!* We feel His conquest in our souls. We know the freedom which comes as He, and He only, breaks the power of sin. At every great revival of religion, this power of Christ's Cross as the sign of God's everlasting, redeeming love for men is made plain. It has always been so, and it always will be so, for this is the essential nature of our religion. By this means it uniquely spreads and grows.

The love of God is not something which we can acquire as we may acquire an art, and then put it continually into practice. I think, for instance, of Miss Eda Kersey, the solo violinist, whose death at the age of forty has made our

contemporary English music so much the poorer. As her obituary in the *Manchester Guardian*, on 14th July 1944, recorded:

She was largely self-taught. When a seven-year-old child, she heard Kreisler play, and at once was fired by the ambition to become a concert violinist. Young as she was, she set herself to practise, and a few years later was working at her instrument several hours every day and steadily acquiring the technique that was needed for the performance of big music. In the matter of interpretation, she learned chiefly from the recitals given by famous artists.

The records of religion abound with many stories of equal ambition and diligent practice in the living of the Christian life. But—as the earlier religious efforts of Martin Luther and John Wesley plainly show, to quote no others—not by this way can a man rise into the radiant, infectious Christian life which is desired. He can, he must, do much; but he cannot do all. At the heart of true discipleship there is always something supernatural, miraculous. The love of God is a gift ‘unmerited and free’, something we cannot understand until, with hungry hearts and teachable minds, we yield the supreme place in our lives to it. So the two greatest English hymn-writers, Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley, never really separate God’s love in creation from Christ’s gracious work of redemption, as they have known it themselves. When we turn to the section in the *Hymn-book* which praises God ‘In Creation and Providence’, we find these words, which inevitably remind us of the Passion:

Thy ceaseless, unexhausted love,  
Unmerited and free,  
Delights our evil to remove,  
And help our misery.

It is as fitting that the soul, mindful of its Redeemer's love, should sometimes sing those words as that it should use Watts's:

When I survey the wondrous Cross  
On which the Prince of Glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Similarly, in the glorious diction of the *General Thanksgiving* we scarcely say the words, 'for our creation, preservation and all the blessings of this life', before we are reminded of the greatest of all reasons for our gratitude, 'above all for Thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ'.

Here is the solace which bids a man confront the shock of life's alarms with the inner certainty that wounds will come, but they will be staunched, and sins may be committed, but he will see them in the near presence of the Saviour of whom he is not worthy, and he will learn to loathe them and be given release from them. Habit is binding, and so is ignorance; but habit and ignorance alike are subjugated to this 'dominion of grace'. The habit may be the ways of life of a rigorous High Churchman, it may be aristocratic in its setting, as John Wesley's was, a *don* secure and entrenched; but it will be changed at his conversion, when he can say: 'I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.'<sup>1</sup> The italics used by Wesley in his *Journal* are significant and emphatic. They say the same kind of thing as Bunyan revealed when he saw the loosening of the burden from Christian's shoulders at the foot of the Cross:

Must here the burden fall from off my back?  
Must here the strings that bound it to me crack?  
Blest Cross! blest Sepulchre! blest rather be  
The Man that there was put to shame for me.

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of John Wesley*, vol. I, p. 476.

Religion which is not deeply personal, as that is personal, and evangelical, as that is evangelical, can offer little to the world. But with that conviction it can offer more than any scheme of political alliances or national education—because it is facing the two biggest and most long-lasting facts of life as we know it. The one fact has to do with the oft-repeated failure of human nature in the individual and in the race, and acknowledges that evil overmasters the good in us unless help comes from outside. The other and greater fact has to do with the way of redeeming love shown to us in Christ.

If we are honest in our examination of ourselves, as also in our criticism of organized religion during the four decades of this century, we shall discover that there has been overmuch reliance upon man's attempts to 'follow the Master' in his own native strength, to the exclusion of the grim, forbidding reality that we simply cannot do the will of God in that way. But the shattering griefs and problems which have increased the sick sense of defeatism lying close to the hearts of men in all countries are bringing Christians back to their true confession and trust in 'the exceeding great love of our Master and only Saviour, Jesus Christ, in dying for us'.

I remember very well that when I was seeking to enter the ministry I had more trouble with one question put to me by a local preacher in the Circuit Local Preachers' Meeting than with all the questions set by the higher examiners appointed by the Conference. This local preacher was not sure that I 'was sound on the Atonement'. The other members of the meeting were satisfied, but he was not, and so for a long time we were in confusion. I did not 'say enough to satisfy him', was his complaint. I tried to explain again what I believed; the Superintendent and his ministerial colleagues, forgetting their role of examiners, came to my aid, and told the meeting both what I and they believed. Apparently they were now in the same predica-

ment as the unfortunate candidate. And then an old, strong, white-bearded local preacher, feeling that the orthodoxy of the whole Circuit was at stake, smilingly suggested that if I could say that I believed of Christ that He, 'His own self bare our sins in His body upon the Tree, that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness' (1 Peter ii. 24), why, then, he thought, his persistent brother would be satisfied. Given that assurance immediately, the whole meeting was completely happy. That wise old preacher who intervened knew his man. He knew that there was one key which could unlock the particularly imprisoning prejudices of literalism in his personal convictions. If you could quote 1 Peter ii. 24, you were all right. If you could not, you were unsound.

That may seem a trivial incident to relate in connection with so profound a matter as our thankful remembrance of Christ 'thus dying for us', but it has been repeated innumerable times and on varying scales. How many 'heretics' have been burned, not because their lives were impure and injurious to their fellows or because they did not obviously trust and serve Christ, but because, at their trial, they did not happen to alight on the exact phraseology their judges wanted?

The theologians of the Church have done their best from age to age to state what is the inner and true significance of Christ's death. But the soundest theologians admit the wisdom shown by the Church in never outlining once for all a doctrine of the Atonement which all must accept in so many words and rigidity of meaning, precise, unchangeable. Poetry cannot be reduced to prose without ceasing to be poetry, its light shattered, its music and bloom lost; and the effort to equate religion with mere doctrine is often as fatal. The fellowship of the Holy Spirit binds us all together in the society of those who are being saved. Two facts there are, essential to membership in that society and to participation in its benefits—and these I would call 'historic' and

'personal'. Our redemption by God's love in Christ was, in actual reality, wrought for us in the human scene of history on that day of sultry, hot, earthquake weather when a little squad of Roman soldiers, each of them with his own rank and name, marched slowly, escorting their prisoner to the hill Golgotha outside Jerusalem. There he was crucified and died. That scene could have been photographed or recorded in a news-reel, if those mechanical devices had been invented then. And there salvation was brought to the whole world. That is the historic, the 'once-for-all' aspect of the crowning work of love seeking to find the lost. It was the price love paid by going on and on in its quest, completely consistent and intent only to be true to its own nature. So a woman will sometimes continue in long nursing of a friend or husband, day after day, night after night, not heeding the limits to human strength and resource. Something happened there on Calvary, something which quite literally split the world's history into 'before and after'. I remember once seeing, in Scotland, a silver birch tree which had taken root in a cranny of a rock; and there, tenaciously growing, it came to its full strength, but in the doing of it split the rock in two. The Cross of Jesus took root in the hard, rocky heart of the world and broke it. A few years later men who proclaimed the power of the Cross and the glory of the Resurrection were being described colloquially as 'these that have turned the world upside down' (Acts xvii. 6). It was a truer description of them than the bystanders guessed.

The longer we live in this way of religion, the more devoutly are we sure and thankful about the deliverance thus brought to mankind. The life of faith takes us back through time. We renew our memory of the specific event, especially in Holy Week, and whenever we partake of the Holy Communion. But it is not an event, recognized by our minds alone as having tremendous significance for us. There is a sense in which we can employ our minds to



recognize the importance of any important past event. We may speculate upon what might have been the English character if William had been defeated at Hastings instead of being dubbed 'the Conqueror'. But it is all very remote, and can make no difference to what did happen. What concerns us, if we are interested in history, is the effect the Conquest had on our country and its life. When we come to a later event, the Armada, and the years of suspense which preceded it, we feel a greater sensitiveness, because the issues involved in religion and in citizenship were nearer us in time; they are more clearly understood and awaken our sympathies and imagination. But when we think about the Battle of Britain, when we remember our blocked roads, our standing-to, when I think of the German who landed by parachute on the coal-shed in a friend's garden, what happened then so definitely and decisively in history touches us in a quite different and very meaningful manner. This happened. We cannot go back now into the flux of events and have its outcome in any different way. It is of the stuff of history, and scholars hereafter will have their say about it with completer knowledge, from their safer vantage-point, than we can even imagine. But for us it was personal, intimate, breath-taking, sleep-withholding. There is something about it which we know that the historian of the future cannot know.

That is the nearest approach, it seems to me, that one can make in comparison between the secular events of history as they affect one and the spiritual events of which we think when we remember the death of Jesus on Golgotha, where the centurion said, 'This was surely a righteous Man'. It has a unique position which it holds in relation to our own lives, and we cannot very well exaggerate its importance. It is a fact—but not a cold fact. Christ died—but He is not dead. He did something—and we are involved in that 'huge transaction'. It was distant and historic; it has its date and place; but yet we feel that we have been there, we

went there as children to a 'green hill far away without a city wall'. We found it, and still find it to be strangely contemporary, with an intimate bearing upon our lives such as nothing else in the world can have. The love of God redeems us, and until we know that as the surest event in our own lives, we have not begun to live in the fullest sense. If it does not seem too paradoxical a way of putting it, we might say that we had to be redeemed by Christ and know His love in order to see what creation could mean. It is by this close, vivid identification of ourselves with what our Lord has shown to us that we understand what men of mystical experience mean when they speak, as Paul did, of dying with Christ and rising with Him, or as Traherne did when he said that we never enjoy the world aright until the sea itself flows in our veins.

It is supremely this experience which makes the language of the spirit within us so clear and sure in its self-expression and adoration. The love of God has awakened His children's highest and best response. It is fashionable in some quarters to belittle the place of emotion in religion, forgetting that love is the greatest of the emotions, as it is certainly life's greatest dynamic. 'Fear wist not to evade as Love wist to pursue.' And here, in the presence of the crucified Saviour, sorrow and joy are mingled in rapture. If we hear Paul Robeson sing, 'Was you there when they crucified my Lord?' we are compelled to recognize the timeless and the personal appeal of Christ as it has evoked response and self-dedication from an ever-increasing number of the dark-skinned children of God. It is not our English mode, but it is making the same real and powerful challenge to man's love of which we sing in the chaste verse of Bright's Communion hymn, probably the most popular eucharistic hymn among English people at the present time;

And now, O Father, mindful of the love  
That bought us, once for all, on Calvary's Tree,  
And having with us Him that pleads above,  
We here present, we heré spread forth to Thee  
That only Offering perfect in Thine eyes,  
The one true, pure, immortal Sacrifice.

That expresses, as completely as language is able, the soul's confident repose in its possession of God's love. It sums up what à Kempis once said for all of us: 'There is no salvation of the soul, nor hope of everlasting life, but in the Cross.'

Since the work of God's redeeming love thus becomes contemporary and urgent, pressed upon us, it is inevitable that we should grow in knowledge of the way in which we are corrected by it, and through such teaching should come to accept increasingly the deep and lasting purpose which God has for us all as individuals.

We do not leap into full perfection of Christian living at one bound. I have only met one or two people who claimed to have come to instantaneous perfection through dramatic and sudden conversion. Of their conversion there was no doubt; but they themselves were the only folk who were sure of their perfection: their wives and families still had some doubts on that point.

The great initial emancipation of life and thought which comes in the experience of conversion is something which brings to religion the dynamic without which it cannot move mountains of indifference and gross sin. As one looks back over the various stages of reformation and fresh impetus in the periods when great men were claimed by God for their proper, destined work, this fact stands out pre-eminently. It applies to the reform of Francis of Assisi as it does to the Evangelical Revival of Christianity in England under the Wesleys and Whitefield. And, on the smaller but better-known scale of an individual's life, the same unique power must be acknowledged with gratitude. One of the

paramount needs of organized religion to-day is that there should arise among us many more people who have this definite sense of the redeeming love of God as it entered their life. The experience of the Damascus Road and Aldersgate Street should be expected elsewhere and in many different lives.

It will be after that, in the long years of subsequent usefulness and joyous service, that we may learn the subsidiary and variable ways by which our spiritual life is corrected from error, and directed with clearer understanding and readiness of obedience into the ways of life for which God requires His servants 'to serve the present age, Our calling to fulfil'. So St. Paul can speak of not yet having attained, and pressing on towards his goal, when he had already reached a state of spiritual liberty and selflessness which, to us, seems quite beyond our reach. If one were to take the consciousness of their need for correction quite literally, it would seem, to judge by some of the words of God's maturest saints, that they were still in the grip of sins against which new converts have to struggle. But what they say about their failure, and about their need of God's help, must be read in the whole context of their life; and then we see it set among tenacity of faith and tenderness of compassion, among certainty of vision and joy of heart which put into beggary our little hoard of spiritual treasures. The great and shining achievements are truly theirs, but also theirs is the expectation 'of something evermore about to be'. Divine purpose is shown to us as the way of development which completes the life on earth for a disciple and gives to him sure knowledge that death itself will make no interruption, but only impart to him new strength, offer him new service, new joy, as he continues to show forth his unending praise for his Redeemer.

As we look back over our hurried years here, we can see the power of the guiding hand of God, His grace going before and following us, preparing us for events and

circumstances which would have brought our downfall, were it not for this work of redeeming love. But because of this growing knowledge we possess of the intimate and personal way in which God has revealed Himself in life, as He promised by the words of His Son to us, we grow in spiritual teachability. We recognize how, in even the most humdrum and inconspicuous life, the soul is purged and constrained so that it may pass through failure to triumph in its heavenly way.

## CHAPTER X

### WHEN DEATH COMES UNANNOUNCED

FOR the Christian the sense of God's benediction should grow through all the changeful experiences and phases of his life. Every hour, every year, has its part to play in his realization of spiritual life. Yet—as we have already tried to notice—the way is never unfailingly smooth and easy. There are some stiff and stony gradients to which God will never supply an alternative route, some busy highways of alternating swift traffic and annoying delays which we must pass along. And all weathers are required for our maturity in the spiritual country as in the natural, times when life is hard and bleak as the iron hills under a frosty sky, and the presence of God's blessing upon us is by no means obvious. It is significant that many of those states of soul which our Lord called 'happy' or 'blessed' are, in fact, the conditions which we dislike most and would avoid if we could. It is one thing to glide swiftly from one beatitude to another on a Sunday morning in church with the spring sunlight pouring in through stained glass, and quite another thing to say in one's heart, 'Grant us this grace, we beseech Thee, O Lord', when we are persecuted in business because we want to do what is straight and honest, or when we know the physical disadvantages of poverty or meekness as we go to the wall before the riches and pride of life. This is the kind of circumstance in which faith must hold us to the expectation that we shall know the meaning hereafter, and remembrance of love must fortify us so that this dread event which has come upon us will play its part, under the direction of that love which has created and redeemed us; and all shall be truly as God wills.

Of all such testing times, there is none more tremendous in its weight of oppressive care and sadness, in strain and

temptation, than when death comes unannounced. And—in one way or another—this kind of shock is likely to affect us all, if we are given any length of years upon this earth, and have any range of human affection and relationship. I am not thinking only of the grim happenings of war, though, of course, the tragedies of sudden parting and alteration in our lives have been increased enormously in these times of bitter strife. But it is truly a constant factor among us. Because of the increase in medical skill and the better conditions of living in normal times, we have been more disposed than were our fathers to hold off at arm's length the spectre of death. But nothing is more sure than that life is uncertain. The unseen reaper is always busy in the field of our activity.

Let me take a little handful of personal memories. They are varied in their detail and happening, but in them all there are the same baffling elements and pains, the mystery, the regret, the mourning. When death comes unannounced, the shock is one of devastating, explosive power, unless already in our souls there has been some imaginative preparation and readiness to expect that, even in swift and unexpected strokes of accident, the merciful love of God may be discovered. Here, then, are some of the happenings which many folk could match from their own memories.

A man goes out on his wife's birthday to post a letter and to have a game of bowls. He drops swiftly in the street, and the desolation of loneliness ends a day which had begun with festivity. A little boy, the only son and the only grandson, in a family with a reputation for public service through four generations, comes home from school, complains of pain, and within a day or two has passed away. A girl watches and prays through long months for the day when her soldier man will come home to marry her, a man who had endured valiantly and fought the enemy at close quarters. He arrives safely, and all goes forward happily; but, having passed through so much unscathed, he is

smitten mysteriously by a germ and dies. A young woman goes down to a shop to get some food for a picnic. People notice her radiant face as she cycles along, but she skids under a lorry, and her young husband is left with a tiny baby. We need not add to these the dread which is continually in our hearts because of the hazards of war by land, sea, and air, so that we are thankful to see the telegraph boy pass by our door, and we tremble as we open some of our letters.

We turn from these ominous knockings upon the doors of our hearts to listen again to the word of Jesus. It introduces to us a wonderful, unshakable faith, His own assurance of grace and love which will sustain us. 'Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.' We have to set over against the swift sorrows which to-day may be other people's, but to-morrow may be our own, this word spoken by our Lord, who knew as truly the tragedies of life when He was on earth as we do, and who knows them now with complete knowledge and ability to help us. He would never speak this kind of word idly, just for the sake of trying to ease the dull ache in the hearts of men or to fob off their agony of weeping with a mere sentiment. This about which He is speaking, we must remember, is as true as the happening which makes men mourners. The one is set over against the other, the comfort of God against the grief of men; and there is nothing in the teaching and practice of the Christian religion more wonderful and more needful than this mighty consolation and help.

We should beware of falling into the bitter trap of trying to discover mere explanations as to why such things happen. I am not suggesting that we should never try to seek explanation; it is part of our duty as men that we should exercise legitimately our minds and souls in quest of truth. But the time for such search is not when we are bruised and weary with recent grief. Nothing but harm comes from spurring and goading the wounded spirit. Some words



once written by Baron von Hugel to a lady who had just lost her little child have universal application in such conditions:

Drop brain, open wide the soul, nourish the heart, purify, strengthen the will; with this you are sure to grow; without this you are certain to shrink.<sup>1</sup>

The last phrase is of special value; it is a warning that would be echoed by any man who has had to deal with people in sorrow. The Christian always emerges from the dark valley either strengthened in life and usefulness, more patient, sure and helpful, or else wizened, querulous, shaken. We can never endure sorrow and be just the same afterwards as we were before it came to us. We are to expect and look for the comfort of God. It will come in many ways, some of them as unexpected as was the hammer-blow of grief itself. We must begin all our preparation of ourselves against such uncertain tides of fortune, against the disasters which are sure to come, though they may be late or soon, by putting in the forefront of our minds and habits continually this mighty certainty, as certain as death itself, that we shall be comforted. And comfort, in this sense, is not the modern colloquial use of the word, which is so often emasculated, meaning sentimental pity. Comfort in the gospel, and to the Christian, means strength which is derived from God's company with us. When Christ Himself was smitten with sorrow, He was left without explanation; but in the Garden of Gethsemane there came comfort. "There appeared unto Him an angel from heaven strengthening Him" (Luke xxii. 43). God has never failed to fulfil His promise, and He sends angels, His messengers, some of whom may have very homely faces and familiar clothes, to those of His children who mourn. What we need is eyes to see them, and hearts that will expect and welcome them.

<sup>1</sup> Von Hugel, *Essays and Addresses*, First Series (Dent), p. 99.

We are to think of all the episodes of life as capable of revealing God, its source and fountain, remembering that we only see part of life, never the whole, and still less of it can we yet understand. And so we are assured that there is eternal life, the great unseen background to our present endeavours with their short and impeded views. It lies massive and wonderful, as the high peaks of a mountain range lie behind the foothills which engage all a traveller's present attention and effort, past which he can rarely see. But as he negotiates the foothills, he knows he is coming to the true heights. It is so in life. It would be wrong if youth were to be obsessed with this conception. Their strength is for the militance of the Church, their horizon the events of the next few years, and even when the accidental dangers of life increase enormously for them, as in time of war, still they have resilience not to be expected in older people. But when we grow older in the faith, it is surely right that we should look about us from the higher vantage points that we have won. It is by such progress that we may add to our Lord's word that other beatitude which has been very aptly called 'The Beatitude of the Departed': 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord' (Revelation xiv. 13).

It is a simple fact of our physical nature that when any part of the body is hurt, all the resources within the organism are strained to the utmost to help that point of weakness and pain. A cut or a wound is a breach of our natural defences, and all the power of health in us rushes to stem the invasion and to prevent loss. In the same way, but on a vaster, infinite scale, there is a law of spiritual life by which the mighty forces of God's compassion are swift to surge to the needs of the wounded life of any of His children. That certainty lies behind all our Saviour's tender and reiterated assurances that 'Your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need', and thousands of His followers, resting upon that word, have proved its truth.

This, then, should be our preliminary faith, the continual

and simple disposition of our hearts and minds towards these possible circumstances.

We may pass on now to look a little more closely at sorrow of this kind and its consequences. What are the commonest features of such grief when bereavement comes thus unexpectedly?

Our first, natural and most immediate sorrow is very often not for ourselves; it is for those to whom the swift call has come. We say, 'Poor chap! Fancy being taken so suddenly!' That is almost always our first reaction, swiftly corrected, at least by word of mouth if not with conviction of mind, as we realize that the blow is not so much upon him as upon others who loved him.

Why are we sorry for them? Let me put the question and, at the moment, attempt no answer, except to notice that the dread of death is something deep-rooted in us, even when we have for many years practised as best we could the Christian faith, and when we have the rich centuries of Christian life behind us with the glorious light of the Resurrection shining upon them all, as of a perpetual dawn that never fades away into common day, but retains all its wonder of freshness, bird-song and brightening hope. We must all die, and something deep within us understands the ancient prayer, albeit, it has a touch of fear in it: 'From sudden death, Good Lord, deliver us.' The warning of the heart against unpreparedness to die is echoed in Bishop Ken's evening hymn:

Teach me to live, that I may dread  
The grave as little as my bed;  
Teach me to die, that so I may  
Rise glorious at the awful day.

If those of whom we are thinking lived faithfully in their discipleship to Christ, if they loved what was true and gave their loyalty of will and heart to the ways they knew to be right, let it be noticed that our sorrow, if it is really pity for them because their life is now but a shadow of what it was,

is a flat contradiction of their faith and ours. 'They have all gone into the world of light.' We do, in our first reaction to the news, think they are losers; and we are so much rooted by the nature of our present life to things of taste and touch, the sight of red ploughland or of noble ships, the scent of flowers touched with rain that has laid the hot dust, the sound of larks singing or the stir of the sea, that we cannot easily overcome the limits of our good world. But the second phase of the sorrow is the one which supervenes. We are sorry for ourselves, for all folk 'left lingering here', the bride made a widow, the child suddenly fatherless, the man paralysed and numb in all his being because of his wife taken from him who was 'the desire of his eyes'. Here are the mourners to whom Christ promises comfort. But before we go farther, we might notice the main elements in our condition when grief thus comes upon us.

The shock of the departure is so swift. We may have been quite prepared ourselves to stride out of this life. It is much easier to be ready to die oneself than to contemplate being left in this life without one's dearest folk. The shock is tremendous to the nervous system, but it is also a shock to the faith we hold, our unseen way of life, our real, though hidden, being. We associate God's ways and workings so much with our loved ones. His love is mediated to us very largely through wife and child and friend. To lose someone at a stroke severs some of the means of communication by which the messages of God's goodness came to us. This shock can be so great that we dare not go back to places where once we were happy with them, or we turn from flowers or music of a special kind because of association, dear, precious, and hallowed, but now fearful and dread because of our empty hearts and rooms. It is saddest of all when folk turn even from their family church for this cause. Robert Bridges' lines—

I never shall love the snow again  
Since Maurice died,

awaken sympathetic chords in us. He tells so truly the kind of shock sudden loss brings to us.

The family had looked forward to the boy's return for the Christmas holidays. A whole month of joy stretched out before them; the weather and the season were all they had wanted. Then, two days after Christmas Day, Maurice came home, indeed, but came home dead. So many, many folk in these recent years, have known precisely that sudden end to their best joys and hopes: they know what Bridges felt:

The best of us truly were not brave  
When we laid Maurice down in his grave  
Under the snow.<sup>1</sup>

How could they be brave or love the snow? How could they be anything other than daunted, bowed, sad? But were they blessed as day succeeded day for them in their mourning? Did God's comfort come? I remember with thankfulness that when Jesus heard of the death of Lazurus He broke into weeping, and men said, 'See how He loved him!' He was not exalted above us in the day of common grief, nor did He become aloof with more than stoical fortitude. Our Lord was once with us in human mourning, as also He graced the wedding breakfast with His joy; and now He shares the ancient grief that has, in our turn, become new and poignant for us.

But this we must beware of, and it is a common state, hurtful to us, hurtful to our neighbours and friends, hurtful to God's work. We must beware of turning in too much upon ourselves. Self-pity is natural; but when it becomes exaggerated, and we believe that never was any sorrow like unto our sorrow, we are in danger of being shut off from people, from God, from our own best possibilities. Then we can become so stricken through disappointment that we may be cross with God, we may narrow down life to bare and dull existence.

<sup>1</sup> Robert Bridges, *Shorter Poems* (Oxford University Press), p. 99.

But, of course, we must never judge other people harshly in this matter. Grief is a terrible reality, unpredictable in its manner of coming, unmeasurable so far as its intensity and effect upon another life are concerned. It behoves each of us to be quiet concerning our own possible behaviour, and most delicately charitable towards those on whom the hammer-stroke has fallen. Whoever has not endured the ordeal should be especially careful of making judgement.

When we have tried to look in as clear-eyed a manner as possible on the twofold nature of human sorrow caused by sudden death, and how people may react to it, we cannot fail to observe how wonderfully true it is that the promise Jesus made to the mourners has been fulfilled. They do become blessed even through their grief. That is, they become enriched, supported, are wise and quietly sure, and at last may reveal radiance from inner triumph. They know that 'Love never faileth' and that 'God is love'. The blessing does not come swiftly; certainly it cannot come painlessly. But it does come; and we should expect it to come, long before we may have any cause to mourn.

With that expectation we may look again at our twofold sorrow. What is the blessing for the departed?

It is that they have gone into richer, fuller life. We mourn their work left unfinished, the possibilities we see as yet undeveloped. That is what we see. But what does God see? The usefulness of their life is not ended: on the contrary, it is increased and utilized beyond our comprehension. We are reminded of this whenever, coming to the great feast of memory and of song, before the breaking of the bread and pouring of the wine, we join 'with angels and archangels and all the company of the heavenly host' to praise God. 'He is not the God of the dead but of the living.'

I think of an old woman who was mourning the sudden death of her dearly-loved daughter with whom she had been living. They had been to a party; the daughter had been singing; and then, within an hour or two, she had gone from

what seemed to be excellent health, and certainly was happiness, into the world beyond. The old mother was stressing her fondness for flowers and music, her garden, her piano; and her grief was made the more real because it seemed to her at first as though, of necessity, her daughter was bereft of these two joys and gifts. Little by little the truth dawned that when people love flowers and music, it is that their spirit is reaching *through* the flowers and the sounds which delight the ear to something which is of the kingdom that is always invisible—the realm of pure beauty. The flower-lover, the musician, is not made poorer, but richer by Christian death. He goes closer to the reality of which scent, colour, sound have been symbols. Get deep enough into love of flowers and you worship the Creator of Beauty. Strike to the heart of music at its best, and your soul is hushed before the Presence of the God who brought harmony out of chaos, light out of darkness, the pleading of His own love in radiant form and hope from a Cross and a Tomb.

Our dear ones, when they pass swiftly from our world are not less vividly, but more really, the personalities we knew and loved. They, and we, are still living in the world of life where God placed us. They have their work to do, their calling to fulfil. Their passing may take us completely by surprise; but God is never taken by surprise. Their swift going is not unknown or unprepared: it is under God's eye and with His knowledge. It would be the complete reversal of the logic of love that God should mark the fall of the sparrow and not make provision for the arrival in a new sphere of life of His highest creatures.

For us left here much the greatest help comes to us as we enter by this very means more deeply into our Christian faith concerning them, rejoicing for our brothers deceased. Our loss is their infinite gain. Grief is not by its nature selfish. We always rejoice when good fortune comes to our loved ones. If we can see, as Christ is willing to show us,

that all is well with them, our love will triumph over grief.

Here, even in such hard and straitened ways of life as sudden mourning, is our opportunity for making our own the great assurance about this very happening which has laid upon our lips, all too lightly, one fears, a thousand times in public worship. But now it is laid as a cross at our own door, 'He that carries the cross is lifted by it', said à Kempis; and it is very true that the Love which never lets us go teaches us gently, as we are led forward through the shadows to the light which causes them. The mightiest preaching which can convert this world to faith in Christ and amendment of its ways comes from the triumph evident in souls that would, without Him, be shattered and embittered. I think of that old-time prophet, Ezekiel, who said: 'I spake unto the people in the morning and at the even my wife died: and I did in the morning as I was commanded!' He went back to work, to God's work, as soon as he possibly could. What triumph of grace and love is there! And it is a victory which has been granted to men repeatedly. It is a right spiritual leading which directs us back to the familiar task and the heavier burden: this is the road to nobler ways of faith and fruitfulness of life.

We shall be shaken, but we shall not fall. We shall be hungry of heart, but God will turn the black bread of sorrow into sustenance for our pilgrimage. We shall be brought where our fathers before us were brought—the fires will burn, but not destroy; the floods will rise, but not overwhelm us. It was written of the pilgrims as they went over the last, black river, and it remains true for us: 'You shall find it deeper or shallower as you believe in the King of the place.' We must think upon the King and what He has said to us, laying it up in our hearts for the coming of the day of dread: 'Blessed are ye when ye mourn: ye shall be comforted. . . . Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.'



## CHAPTER XI

### THE VISION OF ALL SAINTS

For the Christian death is not the end. The grace of Christ and the love of God are to be increasingly, eternally realized in the richer fellowship of those who, having gone this way before us, are now of the 'great cloud of witnesses'. The scene of their service is very different from this arena of time and circumstances 'where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat'. As our years pass and make us sensitive to human fragility, which yet does not fail when it is nurtured by Divine means, the vision of the Church Triumphant grows to enhearten us. It is that sight of 'the saints of God' which has cheered Christian men and women in every generation from the first years of the faith in its onset against the world that has, in our own time, given fresh and terrible evidence of its implacable hatred of Christ's way. The unquenched fury of its fires and torments has made many of His present servants discover in the words of the Epistles and the Apocalypse an alarmingly accurate description of their own perils. Also, thank God, they have discovered the New Testament is even more accurate in its account of the unfailing mercies of God. His peace is more long-lasting than our war, and interpenetrates its noise and smoke. His love never fails; and the fellowship of those who have been blessed with the comfort of the Holy Spirit is unbroken, though its members may be physically separated. God's benediction rests upon us in our 'struggling and failing, struggling and succeeding' so that He may bring to perfection what He long ago began. We shall find no better way of realizing how our own distorted vision and broken purposes can be reconciled with the promises made to us by Christ than by setting our immediate experience in the light of spiritual history. The

man who gave to the Church the first picture of the heavenly triumph of God's servants, John of Patmos, has a new and strange authority for us now. He saw the hosts of God's servants who had passed through great tribulations and had come victoriously, unscathed in soul, into the presence of God. The vision of the saints came to him when he had been looking out on what was apparently a scene of spiritual desolation. All the work to which he had given himself, heart, soul, and body, had been denied him. He had been taken from people to whom he had been ministering, and they, in their turn, had been subjected to all the malevolence which a persecuting authority could devise. Just where his congregation was and how, as individuals, they were faring, was unknown to him. Some, no doubt, had apostatized, not being able to endure unpopularity or the harshness of the trials. Some had scattered and would never be reunited—like so many Polish and Jewish families in Europe that have fallen under the tyranny of the latest persecuting State. Some, he prayed and believed, had been faithful even to death. Yet, as he looked out across the besieging sea toward the mainland far away and out of sight, the human judgement uppermost in his mind was that this misfortune spelt the ruin of his life's work. He would never be able to gather together again that company of folk whom he had loved and lost.

It is precisely the mood which sweeps over the souls of many fine Christian workers in these days. The missionary interned in Hong Kong, the teacher driven out of Burma, the resisting Protestant pastor in the internment camp, the ministers of churches on the East Coast of England and in the heavily bombed areas of our towns, parents and older workers in churches bereft of young people with their promise and zeal—all of us, in our varying degrees of loyalty to Christian hope and labour, have shared the experience of disappointment and frustration. But we are men and women who profess to believe in what is spiritual,

as the early martyr believed in the power of the living God, and the risen Saviour. It was as he thought upon the plight of this world, and what seemed to be the complete ruin of his hopes, there came to him the reassurance of the presence of Christ. It was one of the early fulfilments of the promise that He would be with His servants always. And then he saw the multitude of people, of all lands and centuries, of all tongues and temperaments, whose lives had passed through the fires and floods of suffering, who had suffered extreme poverty and bereavement. But they had come at last into the clear presence of God; and in His unending service their lives were crowned with the beauty of perfect achievement. This is the vision of God's saints which is for our possession. We are to be enheartened by the sight of God's purposes being fulfilled where all about us on earth there seems to be only the overturning of what was fairest and most chaste in the ways of our life. It is this vision which holds us to the remembrance that 'all things work together for good to them that love God'.

What St. John saw on Patmos long ago has been amplified as the centuries have passed, and ages of in-rolling tides of barbarism and cruelty have been succeeded by ages of new, conquering faith and Christian charity. He was speaking prophetically when he told of a multitude that no man could number, for in his day the Christians were a scattered and scanty folk up on the earth, though growing every day. During the past ten years, in which Europe and Asia have suffered the tumults of war, the converts who have joined the ranks of the Church Militant from paganism are vastly greater in number than all the members of the Church on earth in John's day. As we look back upon the centuries behind us, and forward to the successes which are to come in the five continents, we should see more plainly than he could do, the fulfilment of his vision.

Who, then, are the saints of God?

They are, first and foremost, the people whose lives have

most closely and faithfully reproduced what men and women once discerned with the eyes of dawning faith in Jesus of Nazareth. They are pre-eminently the people of God. The preface to the Sanctus which is used on All Saints' Day speaks of them thus:

It is very meet, right and our bounden duty, that we should at all times, and in all places, give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God, Who in the righteousness of Thy Saints has given us an ensample of godly living and in their blessedness a glorious pledge of the hope of our calling: That, being compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, we may run with patience the race that is set before us: And with them receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away.

The saints are the people who, in Francis Thompson's exquisite phrase, are 'redolent of God'. To see them at this life's work, be it only sweeping a floor or nursing a child, on daily duty as carpenter or doctor, as grocer or minister, as soldier or teacher, is to think not of them, but of God, their greatest love. One of my teachers at Cambridge, himself now the bishop of an ancient diocese, said to us: 'Whenever I try to think about God, I catch myself thinking of Professor Nairne.' Because we knew Nairne, we knew well enough what he meant. The saints bear themselves in life, in its lightest gesture or mood, so that they inevitably and unfailingly awaken thoughts of Jesus Christ; but so natural, modest and conscious of limitations are they, that they would shudder at such a suggestion. It is through them that we have our fullest sight of the godly life, of what religion is and does. Once we have seen it, in man, woman, or child, for it is not always a triumph of long years of endurance, we have seen life at its most perfect flowering in strength of character and beauty of tenderness, in depths of sorrow and pain, yet interpenetrated with radiant joy and unhesitating

certainty. Of all the qualities that are to be found in the saint, this radiant, spiritual joy is the most unique. It is the sign of true benediction; and we rightly call the saints 'the blessed ones'.

When the exile on Patmos was reassured by the sight of these triumphant Christians, he surely recognized among them certain dear, familiar faces. To anyone in anguish of mind it enhances the comfort and meaning of this vision if he recognizes that we are not remembering only those whose names are undying: lion-hearted Paul, whimsical Francis or stout Hugh Latimer, calling from the fire to Ridley that they were lighting a candle that, by God's grace, should never be put out. We also think of those whose names are unchronicled except in our own memories. Some of them, perhaps, ran a long course down the years, under skies flecked with many vicissitudes; and some of them, like the best of our young men, went in war, at full stride from the first ardent vows and tasks of love, human and divine. They exchanged the rapidly-opening vistas toward what would be their life's work, for the realm that is so little known to us, though now it is their home.

The saint is of eternity. He lives in the memory of those who loved him, and who increase in their knowledge of him as they themselves advance in spiritual life. A mourning mother may lose her child and yet know him better with every passing month so that, when at length they meet again, it will be with more intimate comradeship than they knew previously. But his life in our memory is only a shadow of that real, urgent, serving life which he now continues to live 'where loyal hearts and true stand ever in God's sight'. And, while we use the word 'memory' in connection with our knowledge of the departed, we should remember that our Faith offers to us a very real sense of their present activity. The 'communion of saints' is not exclusively the fellowship of the Church on earth or the fellowship of the Church above; it is the communion of

those on earth and those above<sup>1</sup> with their Lord, and so with one another, 'One family we dwell in Him, One Church above, beneath'. We are not left alone; but we are, most of us, sadly imperfect in the life of the spirit. The drift of pinions is unheard about our clay-shuttered doors. That figure of speech expresses our poverty. It is as though messages were being broadcast, messages of hope and liberation and achievement, and we had receiving sets only capable of catching the stir and rumour, with an occasional word or two, so that we knew that something was being transmitted, but whence or what we could not fully learn.

Yet it is, as we have previously noticed, one of the paradoxes of experience that it is usually by the way of sorrow and loss we come with sensitive and teachable hearts to learn a little of what, in the day of sunshine and busy success, we do not heed. Dean Inge, writing his tender little memoir of his child, Paula, genuinely a saint though very young, has said a word which seems hard, and we rebel against it at first; but it is very true.

Bereavement is the deepest initiation into the mysteries of human life, an initiation more searching and profound than even happy love. Love remembered and consecrated by grief belongs, more clearly than the happy intercourses of friends, to the eternal world; it has proved itself stronger than death.<sup>1</sup>

At such times the door is ajar that stands in the thick, high walls of time and sense, through which we may look and understand what previously had never touched us very closely. As a child, I used to pass sometimes near the grey walls of an old castle, formidable even in their ruin. The jackdaw, flying from a turret, croaked in mockery of the strength and pride of the Norman baron laid low in the dust, and the wind-sown yellow wallflower swayed on the

<sup>1</sup> W. R. Inge, *Personal Religion and the Life of Devotion* (Longmans, Green & Co.), p. 88.

ramparts. But one day a little door was left open, and, looking in, I saw a flower-filled garden and a path leading down to a house where people lived. Always afterwards I knew that the grey ruin, marked with the havoc of war and weather, was set about ordered loveliness and a place where children ran and played. So, even when the mood and time of our most sensitive vision have passed from us, the memory of what we have seen of the saints remains to give us knowledge of what life is to be within 'the hid battlements of eternity'.

The vision of the saints thus brings to us in our present strife the pledge of God's victory. We know well enough what were their achievements here when they, too, walked by faith; and so we face the riddle of the future and are unafraid. John recorded in his book that he was enheartened and strengthened as he saw the triumphant souls. Being human, he had doubted whether God could use his own life and interrupted work so gloriously. The saint is ever modest about his own achievements, swift to confess with Luther, 'that none should boast himself of aught'. We, looking back, know otherwise. The seed of the Word has been blown about the world by tempests, as well as by fair winds, into very strange places; but the harvest of the faithful has always appeared. And it will come again, beyond our seeing and beyond our gathering. It is not the people who strut in martial processions on to the world's stage who count for most. The unknown man who invented the world's first wheel was one of our greatest benefactors, but he would probably be very surprised to learn he had earned our gratitude more than kings and emperors. And so in the realms of spiritual living, the unknown folk, 'the rude forefathers of the hamlet', local preachers in rusty black, toiling mothers in little cottages, who taught their children how to live, sure about God, sure about their immediate duty, happy in their innocent joys and busy with the everyday tasks of life, these are immeasurably important. We

see the signs of God's victory in the glory of life that comes to full maturity in His service, as it is entered and fulfilled by a multitude that no man can number.

We do not see them in 'daylong blessed idleness'. Far from it! They are more truly at work than when they were among us. They are more truly interesting in themselves than they were. This is the Christian confidence; this is the Christian faith in which we are to live. It crowns our own endeavours with the strong hope that we shall be with them. We cannot think of them without praying that the grace of Christ and the love of God may be with us that we may live as they lived. We see 'in their blessedness', remembering that blessedness means happiness above all temporal happiness, 'a glorious pledge of the hope of our calling'.

The greatest need of our times is for such saints in the making, men and women who long, above every other ambition, to be the people of God. Unless we are that, how can we ever hope for the joy of reunion with those who, as they have gone ahead of us in time, are also ahead of us in the quality of their living? We sometimes speak loosely about the hereafter as though, whatever we do or whatever we become, all will be the same in the end. But that is neither common sense nor Christianity. If the vision of the people of God spurs our effort, it is that, running the same race in the same way, we may receive with them 'the crown that fadeth not away'. In sorrow and joy, in company as in loneliness, in these years of our life, God is drawing us to make us worthy to be with them. 'Tears', said the late Dr. H. L. Goudge, 'can only be wiped away from eyes that have been filled with them.' And if now, in the harsh contest and effort of our day, we are wrung with sorrows, the saints would tell us that we are in precisely the circumstances where we may prove the truth of that word. God needs saints in the making for the better efficiency of His Church and for the salvation of the world He created and redeemed. He would awaken us by every spiritual means of



work and worship to be as those, His bravest and His best, whom now He has gathered into His more immediate presence and service. With that end in view, we are to receive the darkness and light of life, its swift hopes and equally swift rebuffs, and find in our lengthening journey a continual benediction.

*'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all  
evermore. Amen.'*